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Miss Harb June 10th 1868
With Mr Barnett's love :

LATE, BUT NOT TOO LATE.

A Tale,

BY ANN BARNETT.

. "There is a Divinity
That shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will."—*Shakspeare*.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON ;
AND
20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.
1865.



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MYSTERIOUS BEGGAR.	1
II. A DRIVE.	8
III. GOOD BYE!	20
IV. STRANGERS.	24
V. SCARLET FEVER.	30
VI. WORSE AND WORSE!	38
VII. WHERE'S MY HUSBAND?	45
VIII. WELCOME LITTLE STRANGER!	54
IX. FIRE AND MURDER.	59
X. SUICIDE.	78
XI. LUNACY.	86
XII. WHO WAS THE WORST?	102
XIII. A SURE SINKING FUND IS A LAWYER'S POCKET.	113
XIV. MISS MILLS IN PARIS.	127
XV. ST. OUVEN AT ROUEN.	136
XVI. MY MOTHER!	148
XVII. ARE YOU SURE?	163
XVIII. THERE IS NO "CHANCE."	172
XIX. THE MISSIONARY MEETING.	184
XX. THE ARBOUR.	198
XXI. THE BELLS.	207
XXII. EARTH FOR TOIL, HEAVEN FOR REST!	216

	PAGE
XXIII. FATHER AND DAUGHTER.	228
XXIV. CHECK-MATE!	238
XXV. CATCHING STRAWS.	259
XXVI. ANOTHER PROMISE.	274
XXVII. REVENGE.	283
XXVIII. A SECRET'S A SECRET WHEN KNOWN BUT TO ONE.	295
XXIX. WHO HAS A FRIEND'S CLAIM?	305
XXX. THE WILL.	318
XXXI. DEATH, THE GREAT REVEALER OF SE- CRETS!	327

LATE, BUT NOT TOO LATE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS BEGGAR.

A SCREAM! but one would scarcely believe any woman capable of uttering such a piercing shriek as now proceeded from the quiet little Governess seated at dinner with the family at Eversfield Rectory. The kind-hearted Mr. Elton caught her, as she fell fainting against Edith, and gently carried her to the sofa, where the usual restoratives were administered by his wife. A soon as animation returned, she said in a rambling sort of way:—

“Oh, I must go—I must leave you. I mean—— I had better go upstairs.”

Mrs. Elton said, “Yes, my dear, I think you will be more comfortable in the quiet of your own room,” and assisted her to rise; having conducted her to her chamber and attended to her comforts there, she left her and came back to the family circle.

As dinner proceeded, Mr. Elton inquired of

Roberts (the man who was waiting), if any one had been to the house to ask for him.

“No, sir; not as I have heard. When I went to the kitchen just now, I saw that beggar woman who comes about here sometimes, just leaving our back gate.”

“Indeed! Has any one discovered who she is, or what brings her into this neighbourhood?”

“No, sir, and she do never seem to beg, nor want anything. I heard farmer Smith’s wife say, as last time she were seen about here, she looked so bad, like as if she were ill, that she had her in and gave her some dinner; but she didn’t seem to eat as if she were hungry, and she could get nothing out of her, as to where she come from, or to where she were going, only home, and ’twere a long way off.”

“It is very singular; and I have heard that she goes into market every week, and buys and pays for her few things, but never talks to any one.”

“Papa,” exclaimed Edith, “this is the beggar that always makes Miss Mills go so queer——”

“My dear, I do not know what you mean by so queer, but I cannot see what that woman can have to do with Miss Mills.”

“Well, Papa, I know when she is about here, Miss Mills is always trying not to walk across the fields, but only in the garden or village, and if we have by chance met her, Miss Mills goes, oh so white and shakes so!”

“Does the woman ever speak to her?”

“No—at least yes. I mean she does not beg, but passes her two or three times, and looks so hard and odd in her face, and says, God bless you, my own child.”

“It is very extraordinary.”

Mrs. Elton here gave her husband a hint in French not to continue the conversation during the servant's presence ; but, as soon as he had removed the dinner things, and the children were gone to the garden to gather their dessert, Mrs. Elton said,

“As you say, my dear, this seems an extraordinary affair, for this woman was certainly never seen in this neighbourhood before Miss Mills came to us. I think, I had better ask her something about it. This is the third or fourth time she has had this sort of attack, and when I asked her what occasioned such a sudden faintness, and what made her scream, she said it was a sort of spasm in her heart, to which she is liable.”

“Do ask her, my dear, but it must be done with great caution, for I can see she is such a sensitive girl, that we may vex her quite unintentionally. She seems such a quiet meditative person, that I could almost fancy some tale of sorrow attached to her.”

“Yes, and how very delicate she looks with her clear red and white complexion and soft blue eyes. I should really be very sorry to part with her now,

for, although she has only been with us a year and a half, the children are much attached to her, and she gets them on so well."

"I hope it may not be necessary to part with her, nor can I see why it should. Perhaps this is some poor relation, who comes to trouble her for assistance, in which case arrangements might be made to prevent her from doing so. But it is always a delicate matter to interfere between relations, and most persons have some they would not have selected for themselves."

Here they went to look for the children, who were busily engaged in helping the birds to strip the fruit trees. Each had a leaf full of the best fruit they could find, reserved in the arbour for their parents; we will leave them there to enjoy it, and a pleasant evening of united happiness. Oh, surely with whole families, as well as with only the married members, we should say, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder," for are not all family disagreements traceable only to man's work? Now-a-days, happily, we are not called upon to sever brothers and sisters for the sake of God's truth.

Although I hate descriptions in works of fiction, I had better, as briefly as possible, make my readers a little acquainted with the family and residence of the Reverend Walter Elton.

He was the rector of Eversfield, which had been purchased for him by an uncle, who was likewise his

godfather, and had entirely superintended his education since he had been left an orphan at eight years old.

The proceeds of the living would have been too small to enable them to live as they did had not Mrs. Elton added about £400 a-year to her husband's income, so that they had about twelve hundred per annum. They had five children, three sons and two daughters. Edith, the elder girl, was above thirteen years of age, and Ella only just eight. Of the sons, Reginald was the oldest; he was about twenty, and at Cambridge, studying for his father's profession. Charles was seventeen, and was just articled to an attorney, and Alfred was between fifteen and sixteen, and was in the navy, and now absent on his first voyage in H.M.S. "Nile." One sweet boy who stood in age between Edith and Ella, had died of whooping-cough, about a year before the time we are writing.

Eversfield Rectory was a pretty house, but rather smaller than was convenient for the family; but now the boys were so much from home, it did well enough, as the little governess always had her holidays whilst the two sons were at home; one month of the vacation she used to accompany her two pupils to visit their grandmamma at Scarborough. The old lady always claimed them for that time; but could not have them as formerly, without the superintendence of their mamma, or now Miss Mills, and

she had by her gentle manners and kind attentions quite won the old lady's heart.

But to return to the descriptive part of our story.

The house had a pretty portico entrance well grown over with choice creepers; on one side stood the dining-room window, and on the other a blind window for the sake of uniformity, as the drawing-room had been enlarged by a bay window looking down the lawn and home meadow, past the church and winding brook, far away over the country. But, by this blind window stood a thick plantation, hiding the back buildings and leading by an almost hidden path into a beautiful beech copse of great extent. Our readers must bear this in mind as it is the only part of the scenery influencing our narrative, and consequently all that I shall weary them by describing.

We will now return to our friends.

Mrs. Elton had at first intended alluding to the beggar when she visited Miss Mills to see if she required anything ere the family retired for the night: but "second thoughts," as she repeated, "are often best, I will leave her a few days to recover herself thoroughly." Consequently the next morning, Miss Mills, looking paler and sadder than usual, resumed her place at meals and at the studies, and all went on as before. About a fortnight afterwards Mrs. Elton, (as was her frequent custom), asked her to give the children a half-holiday, and

drive her in her little pony-carriage to the neighbouring town of Norton, to make some purchases necessary to equip them for the annual visit to Scarborough, which was to take place at the commencement instead of at the end of the vacation this year, and Reginald was to accompany them: Charles was not coming home until later, and during their absence the rectory was to undergo painting and papering.

At the request Miss Mills first turned very red and then very white—attempted to speak—but failed. Mrs. Elton was surprised at such unusual conduct, and quickly added, “Perhaps there is some reason for which you do not wish to go this time, and I can just as well take Roberts, only I thought the drive would do you good, and you may also want a little shopping on your own account?”

“Oh yes—I mean no, thank you, there is no reason whatever and I shall be very glad to go: it is just what I was wishing.”

“Very well then, if you please we will have lunch and start as soon as we can.”

But Mrs. Elton thought that she certainly looked very strange for a person having her own wish anticipated. She did not know that they were both in the same mind to a certain extent; intending to speak confidentially about what would result in their parting; although nothing was further from the poor Governess’ intention than to discuss the mysterious beggar.

CHAPTER II.

A DRIVE.

ACCORDINGLY the two ladies set off, on a bright breezy afternoon in June, to all appearance on no more important a mission than ladies' shopping, but how little aware was either of what would be the result of this little trip. Mrs. Elton was determined not to destroy the pleasure of the early part of the drive, nor to make her companion uncomfortable a moment sooner than necessary. She, therefore, kept up a cheerful conversation and alluded with pleasure and satisfaction to the visible improvement in the disposition of her Edith, and how even little Ella had overcome a great deal of her hastiness and petulance.

In fact she did all in her power to comfort, cheer and encourage her young Governess; and there can be few (we feel sure) who know how valuable are a few words of encouragement to the painstaking Governess, or surely they would more frequently bestow the costless but deeply treasured and richly deserved boon!

Is it sound philosophy to make the moment of parting, or of the intimation of the necessity to part,

the more deeply to be regretted by sweetening the bitter pill with additional kindness? We think not. —The sugar is sweet but the pill tastes the more bitter in comparison. But we are not philosophers, so will continue our simple narrative.

During the pauses in the conversation (which, by the way, was almost all on Mrs. Elton's side, with the exception of an occasional monosyllable from Miss Mills), during those pauses Mrs. Elton frequently noticed the tear in the blue eye at her side, and the changing colour, and a look from time to time which appeared as if she had something she wished to say, but which could not clothe itself in words. Ah well! thought she, on our return it will be all right. Perhaps, poor girl, she wishes to say something about her uncomfortable fainting fit the other day.

And so they reached Norton, made their purchases, (those of Miss Mills being very few and inexpensive, but were kindly increased by one or two trifles on the part of Mrs. Elton,) and they commenced their drive home again.

Mrs. Elton now felt all the awkwardness of her position. How should she allude to the circumstance at all? or what right had she to suppose the beggar and Miss Mills had any knowledge of each other? However, it had to be done, and, as in many cases *c'est le premier pas qui coute*, she at once rushed into it bravely but circumspectly.

"You look better for your drive ; do you find too much confinement in the school-room ? because if so we can easily arrange that you should get the air twice a day : indeed I think it would do the children good to walk twice."

Miss Mills at first looked grateful and then alarmed : "Oh no ! thank you, I do not think I could walk twice a day : I am not very strong, and—and my spasm——"

"Do you find exercise produce that ? because I have hitherto observed it generally occurs when you are at dinner and ere you have had your walk. Have you long been subject to it ? or have you had any medical advice ?"

"No, it comes so seldom that I do not think it is worth taking advice. I think perhaps—I am not quite sure that this neighbourhood agrees with me—I think I had better leave you"—and she burst into tears.

"My dear, I cannot think that, for we consider our place so remarkably healthy ! I cannot either think that if that be the *only* reason you would be justified in seeking a change ere you have consulted a medical man on the subject. Be persuaded by me, and see Dr. Morris the next time he calls, and he, no doubt, will do so ere you go to Scarborough."

Miss Mills only stammered forth her thanks, and "Oh no, no !"

A pause ensued, but Mrs. Elton was not to be

balked in her object, so she resumed: "Where are you going for the remainder of the holidays after you leave my mother? Are you going home or to friends?"

"Alas!" said she, "I have neither."

"My poor child," said Mrs. Elton, taking her hand kindly, and checking the pony to a walking pace, "why could you not have told me before of your friendless state? Have you then lost your parents?"

"I have never known either," sobbed she, "I believe they both died when I was quite a child: at least my mother must have done so, and my father, as I have been told, went abroad after having seen me placed with a widow with whom he left all directions for my education, &c. until I should be old enough to provide for myself; for this purpose he purchased an annuity to be paid into a banker's hands for me until I should be eighteen."

"But then," inquired Mrs. Elton, "what has become of this widow? Surely if she has had you from almost your infancy she would give you a home still?"

"Good Mrs. Wilton fulfilled her undertaking, I should say, but too kindly. She indulged me in every way, and indeed behaved to me as though I had been her own and only child. She did her best towards instructing me, and when I was ten years old every one said I ought to be sent to a good

school to prepare me for my future life of dependence ; but she would not hear of it. She said the sum of money annually provided for me was but small for the purpose. She should save as much of it as possible, until I was four or five years older, and then have the more to spend on a more liberal education for the remaining two years, and if possible, a little left, that I should not begin by spending my first year's salary. With this idea she engaged a very well-educated girl residing near us, (but who was in such bad circumstances as to be thankful for a little money, and yet unable to go out to teach much, as she lived with an aged grandmother, who could not spare her after one o'clock), to come daily for three hours to instruct me in French and music, and such things as Mrs. Wilton's own limited education prevented her from undertaking, but she devoted much time daily to my English studies, work, &c. Things went on like this, and answered her wishes in every way ; she was only spending the half of my allowance for four years and a half, and then busily prepared to send me to a London school, where I should get lessons from the best masters in the accomplishments which she knew were necessary to my success, and to them she intended me to devote two years and a half. But then happened my great affliction. She was taken suddenly ill with inflammation on the chest. Being of a weakly constitution, the greatest danger was immediately foreseen. She

was fully aware of it herself, and took an early opportunity of speaking to me about my future plans in case she should not recover to continue her motherly care of me. She then told me the money that was paid for me would be discontinued when I was eighteen ; that she feared I must look upon myself as an orphan, and without any friends but such as I could make for myself, for that she knew nothing whatever of my family ; nothing could be heard of my father. No one seemed at all aware of whither he went after he left England, as he had said, for Australia. That now, I should be homeless—that even if I obtained good situations as a governess I must remember I should always be at an expense for a home during the vacations, and must look forward to interims of perhaps several months between my engagements, or even before I procured my first ; that sickness also might bring me into heavy expenses, so that she now wished to urge upon me a different plan. Further and better instruction I must get, but it must be done at less expense ; therefore, she wished me without delay to write a letter to Miss Marston (to whom I was to have gone in a few weeks), telling her how impossible it would now be for me to incur the expense of her establishment, and asking her, if, under the circumstances, she could suggest any expedient whereby I could still become one of her pupils, whether by giving my assistance to junior classes, instead of paying for my board, &c., and then

I should still be able to pay for lessons from the masters, and lay by half my little annuity. This was done the same day, also adding a request that if possible we might have an answer by return of post ; for Mrs. Wilton said a day might be of the greatest importance. Her illness now assumed a different appearance, I was not to be so suddenly deprived of my good friend and mother. The inflammation gave way to the remedies applied, and she began too fondly to hope that our fears were groundless. Not so her medical attendant, he said from the first he did not fear that the inflammation would cause her death, but the necessary remedies which would so reduce her already feeble constitution that she would gradually sink ; and so it was. But she seemed thankful for the time being lengthened that she might see me settled.

“ Miss Marston’s reply came. It was written in a haughty style, and very unfeeling, so much so as to make dear Mrs. Wilton rejoice at what she called my escape. She wrote nearly in these words, for they were deeply fixed in my mind :—

“ Miss Marston presents her compliments to Mrs. Wilton, and begs to state that it is not at all within her province to enter into the pecuniary affairs or other circumstances of those ladies who may have expressed a wish to place their children or wards with her as pupils. Her establishment is of far too high a rank to justify her in making unusual

arrangements : such must be left to schools where half-boarders are admitted."

We then heard, through our kind medical man, of a lady in London, who was left a widow with three girls, in very reduced circumstances, who, he thought, would give me my board and residence with her in return for my teaching her eldest child, about eight years old, as much as I could ; and in the meantime, I should attend Masters' classes at Queen's College, Harley Street. So there it was decided I should go. I could still always pass my holidays with her at small expense, but that she has removed to Edinburgh to get a cheaper education for her children than she could procure in London, and it would have been such a long expensive journey for me, as would have made it cost as much as going to the Governess' Home in Harley Street. But I quite beg your pardon, Mrs. Elton, I am going on without thinking how uninteresting all this is to you. I don't know what I could have been thinking about."

"By no means, I am, on the contrary, deeply interested in your recital, and only wish I had known all your trials sooner. I could at any rate have managed some way to have found you a home. My mother would have been delighted with a young companion for a few weeks twice a year. But pray, proceed. How long did your good friend live after this?"

"My good mother, (for indeed she was such to

me,) lingered on about five weeks. After her funeral, her will was opened, by which it appeared she had a son in New Zealand, for whom she had sacrificed her all to enable her to give him a good education; but he turned out a sad character, and at last left her and emigrated. She used occasionally to receive cruel letters from him. This the medical man told us, as soon as he heard the name read from the will, for no one else present was at all aware she had any child. She never spoke of her trials, but suffered silently and severely. Her will went on: 'From my heart I forgive him, as I hope God will do; to whom I have never ceased to pray for his salvation, and I feel sure his mother's prayers will be answered, although she may not live to know it this side of her grave.'

"To him she left her cottage and what little money she had saved, and to me all her personal effects. I then sorrowfully left the home of my happiest years, and arrived in London, one of the many solitary beings in that crowded city. I was most kindly received by Mrs. Carter, but can never forget the utter misery of that first night. Then indeed I realized what it was to be a friendless orphan!

"The rest is soon told! I studied industriously, but finding I was far behind the present style of Governesses in my English knowledge, I pursued that with music and French for one year, and was then persuaded to seek a situation at once for a few years, save what I could, and go to Paris and Germany to

acquire French and German, and what I could at the same time in drawing, singing, or Italian. I have my income untouched for the year and half I should have remained in London."

She paused; not as though she had said all she wished, but as if that part of her history were ended.

Mrs. Elton felt she was rapidly approaching home without having gained her object. She resolved on a sudden plunge into the subject, and circumstances aided her, for at a turn in the road she saw a poor woman going in the other direction. She suddenly looked round at her companion, and said,—

"I wonder if that is the beggar the children were talking about, whom they meet in their walks?"

Miss Mills turned very pale, but just raised her eyes in the direction, and said,—

"Oh no! that is not."

Mrs. Elton then said, trying to laugh, as if at the absurdity of the idea,—“By the way, Edith says you are afraid of the beggar, is it true? And yet she is not a gipsy, that bugbear of children, nor would you mind I suppose if she were?”

Miss Mills looked so deadly pale that Mrs. Elton feared she was going to faint, so snatched the reins from her with one hand while she supported her with the other; but she rallied almost immediately, and with a very composed look muttered something about her spasms.

Mr. Elton said nothing for a few moments, that she might quite recover herself, then very kindly, but with a firmness that showed no contradiction would avail :

“Now, my dear Miss Mills, I am sure that there must be some mysterious connection between you and this woman. Far be it from me to wish to pry into your affairs, but you have just pronounced yourself friendless ; this woman evidently is the cause of pain or annoyance to you in some way ; will you accept me for your friend ? tell me as much as you please to disclose about her, and allow me to help you by my advice, or otherwise ; you must feel we cannot allow such a mysterious person to haunt our premises from time to time, without endeavouring to discover her motive !”

Miss Mills remained silent for some time, and then spoke in a very low voice, slowly, but in such a decided manner, as showed she was speaking with caution and truthfulness. She asserted that she had no mystery to unravel, that she absolutely knew nothing of the woman—but that it was very singular how the beggar seemed to know her. She must also confess to a very strange feeling whenever the woman approached her, whether it were an instinctive fear of her, or a power of attraction, which she could not repel ; in fact, whether she felt drawn towards her by fear or hatred, she could not say, but it was the sight of her always brought on the fainting attack, and it

was on this account she wished to tell Mrs. Elton she had better leave her family and go to some distance from Eversfield, where the woman would be unable to trace her.

“But,” said Mrs. Elton, “she could not have been the cause of your illness the other day, for it occurred whilst we were at dinner, and indeed, I have noticed, as I before said, that it generally is so.”

“She stood behind one of the pillars of the portico, looked at me, kissed her hand, and then raised her eyes and hands towards heaven, and ran off through the plantation towards the Beeches.”

“It is most singular,” added Mrs. Elton, “but for the present we can decide nothing. I will think what is for the best, but still cannot see any reason for your leaving us. I think our better way would be to have the woman traced, and spoken to, and if needs be, she could be obliged either to give her reasons for lounging about our place, or to leave.”

Miss Mills said, she would rather do as she said, for she had really become so nervous of late, she did not think she could remain.

A few yards more brought them home.

CHAPTER III.

GOOD BYE.

AFTER dinner, Mrs. Elton naturally sought an opportunity to repeat to her husband all she had just learned.

He looked very serious, at last he said :—

“ I think, my dear, we had better let her follow her own inclination. From her general conduct, and excellent principles, I cannot for a moment doubt her truthfulness, in asserting her total ignorance of this woman, but that is no reason that the woman knows nothing of her. If she leave us, we shall soon have proof of whether she was the attraction to the beggar, (for so we call her, although seemingly without reason,) but her friendlessness distresses me much.”

“ Do you know, Walter, I have an idea,” said Mrs. Elton.

“ My dear, how you surprise me ! But as your ideas are not always of the worst, I shall like to hear it.”

Mrs. Elton proceeded to suggest a plan whereby her mother’s wishes would be gratified. It was to

send Edith to her at Scarborough for a year, for the benefit of the sea air, and the advantage of lessons from good masters.

Mr. Elton raised insuperable objections to the project. He foresaw that a year amidst the gaieties of Scarborough would unfit Edith for the quiet home life which must succeed it, nor would he spare her from the family circle for so long a period. In return, he proposed that, as Miss Mills evidently wished to go away, they should coincide, and he pointed out that it would be a great advantage to her to go to Paris or Germany for a year ; after which she could return to Eversfield if she liked.

“Very good,” rejoined Mrs. Elton, “but now for our home arrangements during her absence.”

“They are coming in their due order, my dear, after having disposed of Miss Mills. You know, I am a very methodical person, and like to do one thing at a time, although a near friend of mine is generally in a hurry, and has a second idea chasing the first out of her brain, whilst a third is pushing for entrance, and all three wanting to be put into immediate execution ! There, now, do you forgive your old husband for that impertinent speech ?”

“My dear, I see nothing to forgive, inasmuch as I do not choose to know to whom you allude, and am too anxious at present to talk out our subject to be able to consider which of our friends the cap fits.”

“A sharp blow, very cleverly parried, Mrs. Elton ! so we will now continue our *châteaux en Espagne*, and try to make them substantial. I therefore propose taking the niece of Dr. Morris to fill Miss Mills’ situation during her absence. You know all about her, and how anxious Morris is to get her a comfortable and not very arduous engagement for her first.”

“An excellent plan, Walter. Now who has the best ideas ? the impertinent husband, who makes the caps, or the more impertinent wife who will not try them on ?”

“Well, my dear, I am not going to enter into such a discussion, with a capless lady ; if I did, I should surely get the worst of it, and have to ask pardon again. No, I will retire from the field whilst I am forgiven, and leave you to work out my idea as you like.”

So it was settled. Miss Mills saw the desirability of the plan for her to go to Paris, and whatever might occur afterwards, she could not feel otherwise than grateful for and to such kind friends. At the appointed time, she and her two pupils started for Scarborough, Reginald accompanying them. They remained there six weeks ; then the children returned home, but at a hint from Mrs. Elton, her mother pressed Miss Mills to remain with her until October, when she was to go to Paris.

Madame Rey’s well-known “Institution” had

been recommended to her by Dr. Morris and his niece, in the high terms it so fully deserved. Here then we must leave all the party. But ere doing so, curiosity prompts us to give one peep at Scarborough. Was it passing strange, that a good-looking young man of about twenty, and a quiet looking pretty Governess of nineteen and her two pupils were rambling almost all day? The children no doubt found wonders on the shore, whilst our two *seniors* sat and watched them, and talked——and—— Oh! it was dangerous, very! What was that mamma thinking about, to have planned it all? Probably the ideas were chasing each other too quickly. At any rate, we know that the young lady crossed the channel in October, without her heart! nor do we think that she obtained one in exchange for that which had left her. Not that she went to Paris a heartless girl, on the contrary, she was very kind-hearted; but we think this heart problem would beat more mathematicians than “*pons asinorum*” or the quadrature of the circle has ever done, or ever will do.

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGERS.

Now for the novelist's privilege of conveying people over miles and years, backwards and forwards as he pleases, or as suits his fanciful brain.

I go back, (I hope with the good-will of my readers,) about eighteen years, so much for time's vagary of flying backwards; and our scene shifts, the curtain draws up again, and discovers to our mental vision Moseley Hall, in Cumberland, within a pleasant drive of some of our lovely lakes. It is the residence of Sir George and Lady Strathstone. Of him I shall say but little. He was a very benevolent man, and liked to see every one about him happy; far more sociable and affable than his haughty lady.

She was, I should think, a strict offshoot of the root of family pride; certainly possessed of far more than could be accounted for by a nearly empty purse, and no very great antiquity or aristocracy of pedigree. But she was a remarkably fine woman, must have been superlatively handsome some twenty years ago, and Moseley Hall and its wealthy owner wanted a

stylish showy head to the establishment ; otherwise the couple had little *en commun*.

They had several children, some boys at school, and three girls at home with a governess ; besides two smaller branches who peeped out of the nursery when dessert was on the table in the dining-room.

The Hall itself was singular looking, for, although it had been large enough for a large family in former days, it was by no means sufficiently so for the requirements of these later days, so that the pointed roofs of additional buildings had somewhat the appearance of a flight of triangular steps with, certainly, not the base to walk upon. Then a drawing-room had also been added with a large bay window : but withal it was a pretty place. A nice carriage drive led up to it from the bottom of a sloping field. As you ascended, you saw various clumps of trees, which ornamented the field. One of them, (with which we shall presently be concerned), had a rustic table and seats ; and in the warm summer evenings, the dessert was often laid there, and the children allowed to have their tea there at the same time. So that it was a merry party which assembled there, and often made the whole place ring with their joyful peals of laughter. At the top of the field, to the right hand, was a near view of the church, which stood very prettily at the end of a long avenue of limes which met in an arch, giving the appearance of the aisle of some gothic

arched cathedral. A sweep in the drive took you through a handsome iron gate, and part of the garden and lawn, up to the door.

My readers have now had sufficient description to enable them to join the party under the above-named trees. It was a hot evening early in July. Haymaking was nearly over, and the children had all been busy in the field, imagining themselves very useful, as Sir George had announced that he wanted all the extra hands possible to help to get it carried that evening, as he anticipated a thunderstorm, and probably a continuance of rain.

"Well, my little dears," said he, "how goes on my hay; is it all safe?"

"Oh papa! we have had such fun, and do you know something so dreadful was so near happening," said Emma.

"Why, what was that?"

And then of course, all at once began to tell it, but Papa said—

"Now, one at a time, if you please."

Emma, as having commenced, continued—

"Why, you know——"

"Emma, when will you leave off beginning your news by informing people that they know it already?" said Lady Strathstone.

"Well, mamma, I mean we were all playing at hide and seek in the haycocks, and I had rolled Herbert up in one, and none of the others could find

him, and as I had gone away, a good way, before I called cuckoo, I really had almost forgotten which he was in, and presently I saw the waggon going towards that row, so I began to run as fast as ever I could, but long before I could get to it, I saw the man pushing his great hay fork into a haycock, and then there was such a scream, and I was so frightened, and so was the man, but Herbert jumped out all right, he only screamed, because he thought it was one of us finding him !”

“ Dear me, child, how fast you talk, you are quite out of breath,” exclaimed Lady Strathstone.

“ What a providential escape,” said Sir George. “ How thankful I am sure we should be !”

“ Narrow indeed,” said Lady Strathstone. “ Ah well, it is very fine of people who have no children to talk of what blessings they are, and what a comfort. For my part I find them a very great trouble, and have more than I can manage ; such constant anxiety is too wearing for me. I have not the strength for it ; and now that they have been ten weeks without a governess they are become as wild and incorrigible as young colts.”

“ Well, my love, we will hope when this Miss Bennett comes you will be able to think our children a pleasure, as well as other people do. I do not see they are worse than others ; they are full of life and spirits, and we cannot expect them to be as demure as old nuns. At any rate she will take the trouble

off your hands. She ought to be here about now, but that last train is always late."

"Fanny, how did you tear that frock?" resumed the over-anxious mamma to her second daughter.

Fanny looked ashamed, but confessed that Willie had coaxed her to climb up ever such a little bank just to peep into such a love of a bird's nest, and her foot slipped, and she trod on her frock, but it would soon be stitched up, it was but a bit.

"Well, and the scratched arms?"

"Oh that's nothing, Willie says if I am to be as brave as a boy and climb well I must not mind a few scratches."

"Very lady like, and charming! I hope, Sir George, you are content with the results of allowing your girls to enjoy the air like boys, and not being brought up too stiffly? At any rate now there will be an end to it. I desire the girls pay no more visits to the hayfields with their brothers. I wish my daughters to grow up as young ladies, and not as brown and as rude as boys. However it will be one of the first injunctions I shall give Miss Bennett, never to suffer her pupils out of her sight—and here she comes!" as the carriage which had been sent to the railway station for her now came up the carriage drive.

"Well, my dear Isabel," said Sir George, "I hope at any rate you will allow her to take off her bonnet

and have some refreshment ere you commence your injunctions!" And he laughed.

"How ridiculous you make yourself, Sir George, I imagine I have held my position long enough to know how to do the honours of my own house—even to a governess! Of course Gordon, my maid, will attend to her. And I dare say she would just as soon not see me just yet."

Sir George thought so too, if she were going to impress her injunctions with such a cloudy brow,

CHAPTER V.

SCARLET FEVER.

WE are not going to weary our readers with any of the every day life of the family at Moseley Hall. The little insight we have given in our last chapter is sufficient for our purpose.

The hayfield was no more visited by the young ladies. They always walked as discreet and orderly as boarding-school misses, and no doubt all fear of their getting too brown was banished from Lady Strathstone's mind. Miss Bennett pursued the even tenor of her way, but occasionally moved in what appeared to others a rather eccentric orbit ; but as Lady Strathstone saw but little of the interior of her school room, and it was from the first understood that her Governess should never leave it under any pretext, unless with her pupils, she and the lady seldom met. She said she had depended on the agent she had seen in London to procure her an efficient Governess as regarded acquirements, and whose manners, &c. should be perfectly lady-like. On Sundays all the family excepting those yet in the nursery) dined together, a privilege Miss Bennett did not at all enjoy, for she seemed of such a nervous temperament that only to

to speak to her on the most trivial subject was sufficient to suffuse her face with blushes, and drive the command of any words from her service at the same moment.

Amongst some of her peculiarities it was observed she had a *Shipping Gazette* sent to her weekly, and she seemed to devour its contents with an anxious, frightened look.

She dressed in a rather peculiar style for a young person, for she was only about twenty-five. She always wore a blue shade (or ugly, as they are called, with full reason,) and blue spectacles, if the day were ever so dull, and yet seemed to bear any amount of bright light in the house without inconvenience, and she always dressed in black, and yet did not appear to be in mourning.

The children, one day, surprised her in tears over a little bit of light silky hair, evidently a baby's. Still all this attracted but little notice with them; children do not observe such things much, or beyond a moment's curiosity.

So all *marchait toujours* for about four months. Then was the village visited by scarlet fever of the most malignant nature, and many children were carried off by it. Lady Strathstone thought it her duty to impress a few more injunctions on the occasion, so sent a message that she wished to speak with Miss Bennett in her boudoir. Poor Miss Bennett was in a moment in such a tremor and looked so

pale that Gordon brought her a glass of water, thinking she was faint, and as she offered it to her (being naturally a kind-hearted person,) she said, "I don't think my lady has any bad news for you, miss—indeed, I know it is only to say something to you about the fever in the village, for she has been talking to me about it for the last half hour," and then said, "By the way I should like to speak to Miss Bennett about it, a few injunctions will not be misplaced."

Perfectly true, Gordon, and many was the hour's chat that Lady Strathstone would have with her maid or with her housekeeper; *that* was a condescension, but it would have been far too great a condescension to be as affable with her solitary, companionless Governess; for as she was born and brought up as a lady, she might not feel conscious of the condescension of the act, but consider herself too much on an equality; no, no, *she* must be kept under!

However, immediately on receiving the message she went; but as she entered the room she looked so fearfully ill that Lady Strathstone exclaimed:

"Dear me! Miss Bennett, how ill you look. Surely you are not sickening for the fever? Oh dear! the man-servant is just gone to Sibthorpe, the town where our medical attendant resides. Stop, he may not have started, just ring that bell."

Miss Bennett ventured to say, she felt quite as well as usual; and was very grateful to Lady Strathstone for her kindness, but she did not think there

was the slightest occasion for her to send for any one.

“Oh but, Miss Bennett, I did not mean on *your* account. I was thinking of the children; for if I thought you were going to have the fever I should send you to lodge in the village immediately. Oh dear me! the anxiety and trouble children are! I am sure some of those poor women in the village must feel very thankful that it has pleased God to take some of theirs. Really I wish I had not half so many, instead of expecting another in a few weeks.”

Miss Bennett was thoroughly shocked. And thought, suppose it should please God to take some of her's what an awful judgment it would be, and wondered she was not afraid to have given utterance to such unmotherly feelings; but of course she ventured on no remark.

Lady Strathstone continued as if she had said too much already.

“However this has nothing to do with our business. I was not thinking who I was talking to. If you feel sure of yourself, I suppose there is no reason to send; for if it turned out that you have nothing the matter I should no doubt be expected to pay Dr. Smith for his visits. *Apropos*, Miss Bennett, I think it would be right for you to give the address of some of your friends to Gordon, as in case of illness now, or in future, I could not allow my servants

to attend upon you; and then, of course, they and you could proportion your expenses, to what you would find convenient to pay. I never have my servants nursed in the house, nor pay their doctor's bills, or I should always have them feigning illness, when their only indisposition would be to work."

Miss Bennett merely bowed her assent to all this, which was uttered in a triumphant manner by the lady; indeed she felt too disgusted at such utter selfishness and want of sympathy, but she mentally resolved that the next quarter's salary she would receive should be acknowledged with a notice to leave.

"But," resumed Lady Strathstone, "what I sent for you now was to say that I particularly wish the children never to walk any where but by the brook, for the next month, or even longer, if the fever continue. Dr. Smith says water is the best purifier of the air, and as the wind now generally blows from that towards the village, it will be more free from the malaria, and when the wind sets in from the south please not to allow them to go to that side of the house at all, but in the shady walk, on the north side of the garden wall; and I shall have jars of disinfecting fluid placed all along the wall, and order the gardener to well water the gravel path with it, just before they go out. I am sure I do my duty by *my* children, but you know if they did take the fever, and did not die, they might get weak eyes, or a red coarse looking skin, which would disfigure them for life. Now I

may dismiss you to your duties, but my parting injunction is, look at the weathercock every morning."

Miss Bennett bent and left the room, in which she had not been asked to take a seat.

For three weeks after this she went on as usual. At times she felt unwell, but quieted her fears by the thought that it was nervousness; for indeed what Lady Strathstone had said had decidedly taken that effect. How she lay awake at night thinking over such heartlessness, and of the want of real comfort, (not comforts) she felt in a house where not a luxury was missing; and if she were to be ill? She knew one faithful, good creature, with whom she had lately lodged, and in whom all her hopes for the future rested; she would come any distance to nurse her; and she had plenty of money, in a bank, that was quite her own—then again she would think--and what if I should die? She had relations, near relations too, but where were they now? And they knew not where she was; and would they care? No: one, she knew, would rejoice at his freedom. But there was one little one; oh, so small! if she could but live to see that again! No: she must not die yet! The third week, watchful nights, miserable thoughts and anxious suspense, added to her school-room duties, did their work. Night and day did that poor head ache, and no wonder; but no word of inquiry or condolence did she get.

One day the children were making more noise than usual ; she mildly said—

“If you *could* enjoy yourselves with a little less noise I should be very much obliged to you ; it is only for to-day, but I have such a very bad headache.”

One of the children answered : “Oh, I think you are always having headaches, so it would be every day the same and we must play.”

She said no more.

She used generally to go down when the ten o'clock prayer bell rang, but that night she felt she could not ; so, as soon as the children had gone, she retired to her bed-room.

She scarcely slept ; and, next morning, when the servant came to call her, she tried to sit up, but fell back, exclaiming, “Oh, my head, my head !” The maid tried to persuade her not to get up, but she said such a thing as that was not to be thought of, so accepted Jane's kind offer of a cup of tea from the nursery, and after that intended to rise. When it was brought she felt as bad as ever, and said she did not know what she should do, she feared she really could not get up.

“I should rather think not, Miss, for you ha' got the fever—You be as red as the curtains.” She uttered a groan and fell back fainting, and when she recovered from that, she was so exhausted that

she could not collect her ideas to realize her position. Jane had closed the shutters again, and so, as it was dark, she rather felt as if she had been dreaming, and was glad it was not yet time to rise; she would try and sleep a little, and then perhaps that aching head would be better.

CHAPTER VI.

WORSE AND WORSE.

SHE dozed a little and did not know how the time had past, but was awoke by her door opening gently, and whilst Jane was unfastening the shutters, she heard Lady Strathstone and a strange voice speaking rather loudly.

He was saying, "It may not be safe."

"But," added Lady Strathstone, "I must and will have it done. What, nurse a sick Governess in my own house? No, never; so you must just let her know the worst of it and get her removed."

"Lady Strathstone," added the strange voice, "there are limits to everything, in my profession as well as in others. If it be safe to remove her, it shall be done, but if the case be a bad one, and from what your servant says I suspect it is, neither your displeasure nor the fear of losing your patronage will deter me from forbidding it, and after that the risk that will fall upon you will be heavy." Jane now saw that Miss Bennett was awake, and was sorry enough that she had left the door a-jar.

Miss Bennett said, "Who are they talking about, Jane?"

"I am sure I hardly know, Miss, I suppose some poor person in the village."—And by this subterfuge she hoped she had quieted Miss Bennett's fears. She said nothing, but had suspicious thoughts.

"If you please, Miss, I am to ask how you feels yourself, and to go and tell my lady."

"Oh thank you, Jane——what shall I do? I feel so ill!——Go and tell her I will try and get up and go into the school-room directly;—but I have had such horrid dreams I feel quite upset."

Jane took the message and returned in a few minutes.

"If you please, Miss, Dr. Smith is here, and my lady says you must see him:—he is at your door, Miss,"—seeing she hesitated.

"Oh then he must come in, I suppose; but tell me, Jane, was it a dream, or is it true that you told me I have the fever?"

"Well, Miss, I must'nt stop to talk now: Dr. Smith will tell you what is the matter with you."

We need not be present at the doctor's visit. Suffice it to say that from previous anxiety and overwork the fever had taken sudden and severe hold of the poor girl, and any thought of removing her was quite out of the question.

Lady Strathstone's anger knew no bounds: at first she insisted that she should be removed at

any risk. Was she indeed going to have the trouble and anxiety of the fever in her house, and be obliged to have a Governess nursed and attended by her servants? It was preposterous and she *would* have her removed.

Dr. Smith said it could not be done without imminent danger, and expostulated as much as possible.

But no one knows what might have been the result had not Sir George just come in from a ride and heard a great dispute going on. He came upstairs and inquired who it was that was to be so hazardously removed and whence? On learning it was Miss Bennett, and from their own house, he was greatly shocked. On occasions he could prove himself very firm and decided, and although his words were but few, Lady Strathstone knew what they meant far too well ever to attempt to thwart him. He looked at her with an amazed and very severe glance and said :

“ Isabel, there is such an injunction in the Christian religion as, ‘Do unto others as you would be done by ;’ perhaps you may have forgotten *that* amongst the many injunctions that you give to others. Which of our children would you put out of the house when it was proved that she was too ill to be removed? Let me hear no more of such uncharitable doings under my roof. Dr. Smith, your orders shall all be strictly obeyed.” And he left them.

Of course every precaution was taken ; an old

nurse of the family who did not fear infection, having already nursed several in the village, was engaged to attend entirely to Miss Bennett ; and as her room and two adjoining ones, now vacant, were quite separate from the rest of the house, it was very easy to have everything kept quite distinct. As the fever gained ground, she became delirious, and in her ravings seemed always talking to some Henry, and a baby. At times, in anger and with severe reproaches, at others begging and entreating him not to part her and her pet—her darling—in a manner that would have moved the hardest heart. Then she would seize a little piece of paper containing hair (which she always kept in her hand, or under the pillow), and kiss it and look at it, until the tears streamed down her cheeks.

“ Poor lady,” thought nurse, “ I wonder who it is she talks to ; perhaps a little sister, or may be some favourite child where she has lived before. It must be very hard to them teachers to live years with children, and dedicate them, and be like mothers to them, and get fond of them, and then have to leave them for ever. Ah, there’s many sorrows in this world that some people don’t think on.”

Nurse Penn was a kind-hearted old woman, but she had the one fault so common to her class, that of taking opportunities of prying into drawers and boxes ; and she now had ample chance of amusing herself. But alas ! it only puzzled her still more,

for she found numbers of articles amongst Miss Bennett's linen which were marked M. T. What could that mean? They were such things as were marked in ink, and others had the T. scratched over and B. substituted; and it was evident that such as were marked with cotton, had had the T. changed to B. and where this was not easy a B. added. Then her books, which were but few, told the same strange tale. A handsome edition of Shakspeare had written in it, Maria Bennett, a birthday remembrance from her own Henry. That might be a brother, why not? But others had a piece of paper neatly gummed over some writing, and then her name written on that. But Nurse Penn's eyes were very good for her age, and by holding the page up to the light, she saw in a Bible, written in a masculine hand, "Maria Thorley. Her husband's first gift." What could it all mean?

Well, all this amazed and amused the nurse at any rate; for it gave her curiosity and imagination a world of employment for nearly a week.

At the expiration of that time a very simple solution arrived. I suppose that she felt that she could bear her secret no longer, and like many other nurses, who are accustomed to meet the same doctor from house to house, she used sometimes to treat Dr. Smith to a little of her gossip. So on his arrival one day, after the usual consultation about the patient, (which

always took place in the adjoining room), she said :—

“ You didn’t happen to know anything of the poor thing before she came here, I suppose, sir ?”

“ Not a word—never saw her before this illness.”

“ Ah well, sir, you’ve a been the saving of her life, but I was wondering——”

“ Well, Mrs. Penn, out with it, what were you wondering ?”

“ Well, sir, I was just a wondering whether she will be glad or sorry ?”

“ Glad or sorry ! why, you stupid woman, glad to be sure ; where is the girl of her age who wants to die ?”

“ Well, sir, she can’t be very happy I’m thinking, with no home and no friends, for Mrs. Gordon says she’s got none.”

“ Well then, she will hope the worst part of her life is over, and will look forward to get a home of her own, and a good husband and children as friends.”

“ Do you know, sir, it is very strange, but in her ravings, she was always talking to some one she called Henry, and some little baby ?”

“ Well, nurse, what of that ? are there not plenty of Henry’s and babies in the world ? Perhaps it is some scamp of a brother and his baby, that she is fond of, and they may be gone abroad, like everybody else now-a-days.”

"Very true, sir, I never thought on that. But then——"

"What, something else, Mrs. Penn? You are determined I see to make up some history for her. What next?"

"Why, sir, you see we nurses have many oppurtunities like, of seeing people's things."

"Or else you make them, you know, nurse! we understand each other!"

"Well, sir, its no sort o' use a contradicting of you, you will have your jokes. But, as I was going to tell you, there's lots of her things as is marked M. T. instead of M. B., and a Bible have got Maria Thorley, her husband's gift, and another book, have got Maria Bennett from her own Henry."

"Well done, Mrs. Penn, now what can there be unaccountable in all that? as I said before, Henry may be her brother, and as for Maria Thorley, it may have been her mother's Bible, or is it not a possible and not uncommon thing, that some friend has died and left her all her things?"

"Well, sir, I don't deny but it may be, I never thought on all that; you see what it is to be without book learning."

"Very well, Mrs. Penn, now good morning, and find up some more wonderful mysteries, or you will never make half a nurse yet. Your patient is getting decidedly better, and you must keep her as cheerful as you can, for she has not a bright time of it here."

CHAPTER VII.

WHERE'S MY HUSBAND?

NURSE was not at all satisfied with the Doctor's elucidation of the subject; she liked her little mysteries, and did not see why they should turn out such accountable common-place affairs.

However, thought she, I'll bide my time and find out more, or my name is not Penn nor hers Bennett—well, nor I don't believe it is either for the matter of that!

Miss Bennett got better daily, and was soon to be allowed to go out, and then, it was thought best that she should go away for a little change ere she mingled again with the rest of the household. The precautions had been so perfectly successful that no one else in the house had as yet shown any symptoms of the fever.

One day nurse was quite determined on discovering, (if there were anything to discover,) concerning this mysterious Henry and the baby. So as she sat in the window at work, and her patient was sitting up in an easy chair by the fire, she tried very cleverly,

as she thought, to work round to her subject, but, as we shall see, she rather failed.

She talked of the weather, and of people going home from the sea-side, for Christmas, and asked Miss Bennett if she were going home for her holidays.

Miss Bennett answered quietly, "No ;" but it was followed by an involuntary sigh.

"Then perhaps you be going to visit friends ; no doubt you have a many."

Again, "No ;" and she closed her eyes as if weary and not wishing to talk. But the ruse did not answer.

"Did you ever live in any other family before this, Miss?"

"No ; this is my first situation."

"Well, Miss, you'll excuse me, but you know we nurses have great oppurtoonities of sccing things—Not as I ever pried into any onc's drawers, as I have a' heard other nurses does ; I would'nt demean myself by such ways ; but in a harin your clean linen whiles you was so ill, and you know I was obleeged to get everything out for you, I see'd such lots of your things wasn't marked B., I thought as perhaps you'd lived somewhere else."

Poor Miss Bennett reddened painfully at this, but still hoped no further discovery had been made by this very discreet nurse : but what is hope ? In a minute it was wrecked—for, continued nurse—"I just took out your Bible one day to read a bit and

see'd Maria Thorley wrote in it, so I thought-----" What she thought we know not, for with a heavy fall there was Miss Bennett lying senseless on the floor !

Of course nurse now reproached herself (when it was too late), but she did all she could to recover her and placed her on her bed : but, as soon as she came to herself at all, ere opening her eyes to realize where she was, she shrieked, " Where is my husband ? Who talked of my Henry and my child ? " And then in a sort of hysterical sobbing which proved too much for her in her present weak state, she again sank into a state of insensibility.

The nurse was now so frightened that she was most thankful to hear Dr. Smith's step approaching the room. He immediately saw that her present state was the result of some great excitement, and turning to Nurse Penn to inquire the cause, she was obliged to tell all that had taken place. He simply said, " You will have to answer for your gossiping curiosity, most probably by the death of this poor girl. I do not think there is a doubt but that brain fever will ensue, and if so, after such an illness as she has just experienced, it is scarcely possible she should recover. How sad it is that her lot should have been cast in such a house and she so friendless ; but I must see Lady Strathstone about it."

He just remained to see her recover again from her swoon, but her mind was all in a state of be-

wilderment. At one moment she seemed to know where she was, and the next, asked for her husband, her Henry—and her dear little Annie; adding, in most affectionate tones to Dr. Smith: “I knew you would not be so cruel as to leave me and take away our little Annie; I was sure you would come back—you will never leave me again!—All my money, yes, *all*; I can earn you more; I’ll sing;”—and then she tried to sing snatches from the operas of the day in a voice that even, in her present state, showed it was by no means a common one. “Only stay with me and let me have our Annie again, and I will sing and earn plenty—I knew you loved me.”—Then a sudden ray of light seemed to break in—she rubbed her hand across her eyes and forehead and exclaimed, “Dreaming again, always dreaming!”—and sank exhausted.

Dr. Smith was much affected, and felt sure that, for this time, Nurse Penn was right, and there must be some sad tale of a breaking heart before him. He gave her a composing draught and had the room darkened, and after enjoining the strictest quiet,—“for,” said he, “I feel convinced that her life depends on the next twenty-four hours,”—he quitted them.

He had intended asking to see Lady Strathstone at once, but remembered that hitherto his visit had always been paid to her ere he went to his patient; for, as Lady Strathstone had feelingly remarked, it could not make the girl better or worse whether she heard from him how she was progressing after he left

her to-day or ere he saw her to-morrow, and so prevent the chance of his carrying the infection to her room. However, in the worst part of her illness, as Dr. Smith left the house, she used to place herself at her boudoir window, which was over the entrance, and he used to look up and just say "Better" or "Worse," as the case might be. The usual ejaculation, if she heard she was not so well, being, "Dear me! I hope she will not die in my house; what a trouble and expense it would be."

So as usual he left the house, but as he descended the carriage drive he saw Sir George coming across a field, and decided on bending his steps that way, to tell him first. He knew Lady Strathstone would be angry at it, as she chose to be thought first in every thing; but then he should not see her until the next day, and chance had thrown Sir George in his way, so it was but natural that he should mention it to him, as well as inform him of the present precarious state of Miss Bennett.

He did so as briefly as possible; and then asked Sir George how it had better be made known to Lady Strathstone.

Sir George laughed at the idea of Miss Bennett being married. He said she was just in such an excitable state that any thing might have brought on the fainting attack. The bare mention of names that might have caused her much sorrow and suffering was sufficient for that; and of course in delirium

no one knew what nonsense they talked. His opinion was that nothing had better be said on that subject to Lady Strathstone just now; but that he would tell her he had met Dr. Smith, and found, that owing to something that had excited her she had fainted, and was now very ill again; then they parted. Sir George now began to think what should be done, and the more he thought, the more puzzled he became. He confessed to himself that it was perfectly possible she might be married, and if so where was her husband? Why were they parted? Why had she not said she was married? or called herself a widow? or anything? which just means nothing, but that people do not know what to say next.

He went in, and finding that his *cara sposa* was alone in the drawing-room, he told her at once as much as he thought necessary. She immediately exclaimed, "I don't believe one word of it. She is just pretending a relapse, to add to my anxieties; at this moment she might have had a little more feeling for other people, I think!"

Sir George thought that at any rate in this instance his lady was not judging others by herself.

She added: "I shall see the nurse—she shall go for a few turns round the garden first, and then I will go and speak to her in one of the spare rooms."

Sir George thought, now it must all come out—

ah well, it will save Dr. Smith and me some trouble. So he said :

“ Well, do as you think best, my love, but I would not agitate myself too much, and after all—”

“ I will not be dictated to, Sir George.” And she immediately rang the bell.

Sir George was rather curious to know the result, so he took up a newspaper, and sat down.

In due time, and after the prescribed airing, Nurse Penn appeared.

“ Nurse, I desire to know exactly all that has taken place to agitate Miss Bennett, and to produce this relapse.”

Nurse was quite unconscious of how much was or was not known, and naturally supposed Dr. Smith had told all ; on such premises therefore she began with :

“ Well, my lady, you know I supposed something of the sort at the first, only Dr. Smith laughed at me—still I considered 'twere my duty to you to find out whether she were married or not—”

“ Married !” shrieked Lady Strathstone, “ what can you mean ? Who is her husband ? Why didn't she say so ? A hypocritical, designing creature ; to dare to come to *my* house under such false pretences. But who knows whether she is married at all ? A disreputable creature. I'll see her, and dismiss her this very minute !”

The nurse said, "My lady, it is impossible; she is quite ill, and delirious again."

Sir George added; "Perhaps, after all, it is false, only something she has said in her delirium—at any rate let us hear what nurse can tell us about it."

Nurse Penn thus called upon, related all she knew, or did not know, on the subject; but being rather frightened at the effects of her imprudence, she put a tolerable limit to her surmises this time.

"You see," said Lady Strathstone, "there is not a doubt of it. No! for once I am determined; I will act for myself; (when did she not?) I have no doubt all infection must be past, and as soon as she can get up I *will* see her."

"That," said Sir George, "you positively shall not, even if I watch by her door to prevent it myself. You cannot oblige her to leave in her present state, nor yet without her quarter's notice; she has behaved well ever since she came, and if it turn out that she is married, and you can prove that to be any objection, it is the fault of your taking people only on what those agents say. If she be not married, you must prove that. Any way, she cannot leave yet. Send her a note, if you like, with her salary and a quarter's notice from Christmas, but more than that you cannot do."

"More than that I *will* do, nevertheless," thought the lady, but did not venture to say so.

She dismissed the nurse, and, as Sir George thought she would do nothing very decided until her plans should be more matured, he went out. Little did he know the quick determination of a strong-willed woman!

CHAPTER VIII.

WELCOME LITTLE STRANGER.

As soon as Lady Strathstone knew her husband was gone out, she penned the following letter :—

“Miss Bennett, (or whatever may be your true name,)

“As I understand you have intruded yourself into my family, and continue in it as a base deceiver, you will not be surprised at the purport of this letter, or at my present steps. Indeed your conscience must have expected it from the first.

“Whether you are married or not, I do not care to know : of course, I presume you are not ; no respectable female would try to pass for single, if she were married ; consequently you are a still worse character than simply a deceiver. Your conduct subjects your character to any such constructions as we choose to put upon it, we therefore view it in its very worst light. I herewith enclose your salary up to Christmas, and also a half-quarter beyond, which I consider very liberal, as, under the circumstances, I am certain you cannot demand any. I should be

justified in dismissing you at once, without even paying you beyond to-day.

“I desire and insist, that as soon as it is *by any means possible*, you leave my house, without daring to communicate with any one of its inmates beyond your nurse, who will accompany you to whatever place you select, but the farther from me the more desirable.

“As for your relapse, &c., I do not believe a bit of it. It is a deep hypocritical game you are carrying out, but it will succeed no longer with me.

“ISABEL STRATHSTONE.

“*Moseley, Dec. 1st, 1834.*”

She rang her bell, and told Gordon to give the note to Nurse Penn, and not to go inside Miss Bennett's door; but to tell nurse to give it as soon as she was a little better. There, thought she, now I have settled her, and shall be rid of her no doubt in a few hours. Nurse guessed that, after what had passed, it was not, at any rate, a friendly missive, so wisely determined to see her patient a great deal better, and wait until Dr. Smith should come, (as he had promised to do, in the evening,) ere she should venture to give it her; thinking, no doubt, that she had done her share towards agitating her for to-day.

Besides, Dr. Smith had said, her life depended on her being kept perfectly quiet for the next twenty-four hours, and as she justly judged that this would

be her own last employment in the house, it could not much signify on what terms she and Lady Strathstone parted.

Poor Miss Bennett lay in a sort of stupor for many hours. Nature, (as she often is,) was now the best doctor.

It was getting late in the afternoon and dark, when she first moved. Nurse had not ventured to stir, even to procure a light, for fear of disturbing her ; and had thought and thought over past and passing events, until she had nearly thought herself to sleep ! So she was a little startled at first by a slight moan, and then in very low tones,

“ Oh where am I ? ”

She went immediately to the bedside, and said, “ Did you want anything, dear Miss Bennett ? ”

“ Oh, Henry, Henry ! ” was all she said.

“ Dear me,” said nurse to herself, “ she’s off her head again.”

She gave her something to drink, which the poor girl swallowed with avidity, and then sank back again on her pillow. Nurse thought she had better say nothing more, quiet was best for her, so lighted a lamp and arranged the shade so that all that part of the room was quite dark, and returned to her own seat by the fire.

But Nurse Penn’s quiet was not to remain undisturbed any more than that of the other inmates of the mansion.

It must be remembered that Lady Strathstone's agitation and excitement had been very great; it was not lessened when Sir George returned and learned what she had done, and upbraided her most severely for her want of all feeling, and indeed want of common humanity. He told her he had little doubt from all Dr. Smith had said in the morning of Miss Bennett's dangerous state, that her immediate death would be the consequence. Of course an altercation followed, as to why, or why not, had she been made acquainted with all the particulars, and she got so enraged with him, because only herself was to blame, that she lost all command, and it ended in a violent fit of hysterics; this was followed by such symptoms, that Dr. Smith was sent for in the greatest haste, and *faute de mieux*. Nurse Penn summoned. She soon saw the real state of affairs, and asked that Lady Strathstone's usual nurse might be sent for without delay. However she could not possibly arrive ere the next day.

Dr. Smith came, and the baby came also! Alas! poor child, if "welcome little stranger" appeared on the pincushion, it was only there!

Dr. Smith visited Miss Bennett, and said if she continued quiet she might yet recover, but that her nerves had received such a shock, as it would take months to get over, and if brain fever returned, he would not answer for her mind. She, no doubt, would be very wandering still, whenever she roused from her lethargic state, but he fancied that during the time

of stupor her mind was inactive. He left very late at night, and returned equally early next morning, bringing the other nurse with him—he had picked her up *en route* from the railway station.

Nurse Penn therefore resumed her post with Miss Bennett; which indeed she could scarcely be said to have quitted, for the baize door forming the communication between the rooms, by means of a short passage, had been kept open. Jane had been stationed in one of the open rooms to watch if Miss Bennett awoke, and to call Nurse Penn, and nurse on her part, had been in and out hourly. The next day saw but little improvement, but still there was some; when Miss Bennett did speak at all it was not invariably in an incoherent manner. She for the most part only said, “Oh my head!” or asked for something to drink, but there was no more wandering or addressing the mysterious Henry and Baby, and so she continued three days. Lady Strathstone and her little girl progressed favourably, but she had never uttered a word about Miss Bennett or her note. She must have known from many circumstances that she was not gone, and so, no doubt, concluded that the letter had not yet been delivered.

CHAPTER IX.

FIRE AND MURDER.

A FEW days only passed, Miss Bennett was able to sit up again, but had not had the note. If Sir George had but known it, or if his lady had but made the natural inquiry, what fearful events might have been avoided! The punishment for all Lady Strathstone's recent conduct was indeed coming, and in its heaviest form. Unfortunately she would not be the only sufferer. As long as this world stands, the innocent must suffer with and for the guilty!

As our interesting invalid was sitting by the fire one day, the communicating door before-named was open for a few minutes. She heard a baby's cry. She started up—then sat down—then, with a sort of gasp, shrieked—

“Whose baby is that?”

Nurse replied: “La, my dear, why whose should it be, but Lady Strathstone's! 'twere born this week back, and is the sweetest little girl you ever see'd.”

Miss Bennett groaned more than spoke:—

“And she says she has too many already, and

wishes she had only half as many—the bad, wicked woman! and others would give their all to be with their one. Oh nurse, I can't bear to hear a baby cry." And she rocked herself to and fro as in very agony, and sobbed for some moments.

Nurse thought, "this will never do, if she is so excited at the baby's voice, and she must often hear it—perhaps it would be better to give her the letter;" which she felt sure was a dismissal, and Christmas was now so close by!

At last, after debating for some minutes, what she had better do, she told her that Lady Strathstone had given her a note for her the other day, but as she had been too ill to read it she had put it in her drawer, would she have it now?

"Oh yes," said Miss Bennett, "it is nothing very particular I dare say; perhaps, she has sent me my quarter's salary, she would think I must be wanting money just now."

She took the letter from nurse, and feeling it contained money, as she expected, she did not open it, but sat thinking of how she should word her notice to leave in March, when she acknowledged the salary.

Thus the time past on, until evening; it was snowing fast, and had been doing so all day. Nurse Penn was to leave her that evening, and Lady Strathstone's nurse and the baby were to occupy one of the

adjoining rooms in case she should require anything during the night.

About 9 o'clock, Nurse Penn came in to take leave of her for that night, but as she was going to stay two days in the village, she said she should come up again to see her before her final departure, and help her to pack her box, against she should be able to leave for her holidays.

"Do," said Miss Bennett, "I should not like to say good bye to-night,"—and thought she would then see what she could spare her from her scanty purse, as a little remembrance.

Nurse had been to Lady Strathstone during the afternoon, and therefore now knew part of the contents of the letter, but as she had given it to Miss Bennett, it was too late to get it back again, and it was arranged that she should remain with her village friends until Miss Bennett should be sufficiently recovered to travel, and that then they could go together. So that nurse knew the packing would be for more than holidays, but *could* not tell her that night.

Miss Bennett sat thinking some time, then began to undress herself. Just before she got into bed the note caught her eye, so she opened it, put the money in a drawer, and proceeded to read the letter, which appeared strangely long for the occasion; indeed, she did not see the necessity for any.

We may imagine the effect it produced in her

present debilitated state. It was too sharp a blow to cause fainting, or hysterics, or tears. She was stunned by it, the very blood in her veins seemed to turn to ice. She staggered to the bed, and sat some time, she knew not how long, it might have been hours. She was so stupified she realized nothing. She seemed to be beyond thought—she scarcely knew whether she lived—and there she sat in her night-dress and wrapper, and bedroom slippers—the candle burnt down, the fire went out—it was cold, bitterly cold, but she did not feel it.

At length a sort of sensibility returned, but not sense. A frenzy seemed to seize her; she muttered fearful things—imprecations against “that vile, heartless woman;” such curses as one can scarcely read or hear on the stage without a cold shudder, but such are not, cannot be sins; they were such as are uttered in madhouses, by those poor creatures who with their senses have lost all responsibility. She was for the time mad!

“Ah,” she muttered, “I will revenge myself; yes, revenge is sweet, and I will now taste it. She has too many children, has she? well, and I have too few—yes, *one* too few; my own, my precious Annie. She was torn from me, and so shall *her* new baby be torn from her. She shall know what it is to a mother to lose a child by something worse than death, and may she never forget it.” And so she went on talking to herself in a sort of hoarse dreadful whisper.

She then took her money again out of the drawer, and what more she had, but suddenly throwing down the salary as in disgust, she said, "No, I'll not take her polluted gold. I have enough, and if I meet Henry I will give him plenty;"—then she gave a sort of demoniacal laugh of triumph. She got a hand-bag, (into which she put her books, which bore his name or writing, and a few little gifts she had received from him in happy days,) and her dressing case, containing her marriage certificate, a locket of his hair, and his likeness, and other little things which were valuable to her; but she never had a thought of putting on warmer clothing, with ice in her veins she was not cold. She had a volcano of revenge in her heart and brain. Perhaps she had no formed plan, but one, at first. She was mad, mad as possible for revenge.

Ere leaving her room she placed her lighted candle carefully under the bed, so that it would take some time for the mattresses, &c. to smoulder ere the hangings would catch fire, but when that should take place the fire, in that room at least, would have taken too firm hold to be easily extinguished. Oh there was fearful method in her madness. She then crept softly, oh so softly, to the next room. The nurse was in a sound sleep—indeed it is generally thought that those wakeful, watchful creatures can manage to sleep very soundly, even when they should not, but here was an excuse certainly; all was going on

well with the patients, and she had been sitting up, (at any rate nominally,) for several nights. The baby was, as Nurse Penn had said, a sweet little creature, and was sleeping as soundly by the side of the nurse.

Miss Bennett's eyes glared satisfaction. She took the infant up very gently, muttering, "Revenge, revenge, oh thou art sweet!"

With her tiny burden she noiselessly descended the stairs, went to the dining-room, which opened on the lawn—where she was going, or what to do no one can tell. She opened the shutter, then the window, and stepped out on the lawn; no fear of making a noise there, for the snow was more than ankle deep. She went across the little piece of ground, which lay between the house and field, until she reached the clump of trees, where we were first introduced to the family at tea. Here lay the great mastiff, which was always let loose at night for the protection of the premises: no doubt he had crept under the table, as being the warmest spot.

She did not see him, but sat down a moment. As she did so she saw the light burning, aye, flaming up in her room, and perceived that her fire of revenge was, from some cause, burning more quickly than she expected. She had left her door open, and the rush of air had carried the flames towards the curtains! She gave a frantic scream of delight, and exclaimed, "Now she shall burn, burn; but, baby, I

have you now, you are mine for ever ; now I have a baby for my own again !" Her voice roused the dog ; he sprang at her, and bit her leg, with a savage growl. The pain and loss of blood, added to previous weakness, caused her to sink senseless to the ground, and as she did so the baby fell from her arms, into the pool of blood which was flowing from her wound.

The alarm of fire was soon raised in the house ; but a still greater alarm was created when the nurse missed the child from her side, and rushed to Lady Strathstone's room, supposing it must be there. It was no where to be found ! The next discovery was that the Governess was gone also. It would be impossible to depict the confusion — people racing hither and thither for buckets of water ;—the large dinner bell hanging outside the house being rung violently, in order to rouse the neighbours ; Lady Strathstone screaming in hysterics. For the moment every one's object was so much to extinguish the fire, ere it reached the principal part of the house, that the Governess and baby seemed forgotten.

At last that object being gained and only minor damages the consequences, Sir George suddenly bethought himself of them, and gave hasty orders to the men to search the premises for Miss Bennett and the baby. No doubt could exist but that they were together, and that she was the incendiary ; but,

wherefore, was a deep mystery no one could then stop to fathom.

On her dressing-table lay part of the money, two bank notes which she had so burned, as to render them, as she hoped, useless, although sufficient of them remained to show what they had been, and the rest which was in sovereigns, lay thrown on the floor. A square paper was stuck in the looking glass with one word written on it in legible characters,—the hand must have been tolerably steady which wrote it—it was “Revenge!”

One man suggested that she had eloped, for he had come in through the dining-room, the window of which had been opened from within; others laughed at the idea; why should she elope? she could have married whom she chose; there was nothing to have driven her to such a step! She could have left any time she liked, there certainly was no one at Moseley to oppose her marriage; besides why elope and take another person's child? and she had left her money behind. And one or two, (as is sure to be the case) said they always thought there was something queer about her. Such remarks were abundant on all sides, as, in different companies, they prosecuted their search.

Her foot-marks were traced to the trees: and there she was, perfectly insensible; so much so, that they thought she was dead, and were for leaving her whilst they sought the baby, for that was not with

her. One suggested that she might not be quite dead, and so three or four agreed to carry her to the house, whilst the others went on. As they raised her, they discovered the blood and the baby's wrapper which was hanging on her arm. At length the searchers whistled and called for Briton, the great dog. After some little time, he appeared hanging down his head, and with his tail between his legs, as if quite conscious of the evil deed; and fearful proof of his guilt was in the blood about his mouth. They were disposed to kill him on the spot, but one of the party suggested that they might yet discover what he had done with the child.

On restoratives and gradual warmth being administered, Miss Bennett rallied—a few minutes more, and every one felt convinced that the cold would have completed what the dog's wound had begun. Perhaps it was that very cold, nevertheless, which saved her, for it had stopped the flow of blood.

Her wound was properly dressed, and she was put into a bed; but during the whole of the proceedings she never spoke, and only opened her eyes once to close them again instantly.

Nurse Penn was reinstated, as it was thought the only chance of getting at any truth was to keep her so perfectly quiet that her mind should not wander.

With this view everything was so arranged that when daylight should return, she might perhaps be led to believe that she had only had a dream.

But she was more conscious than they at all imagined. The shock, the loss of blood, and the intense cold had altogether acted on her brain, as does anything of the sort on a drunken man.

Dr. Smith was the first person who saw her next morning. He told Sir George that she was quite in her senses, but dreadfully weak; he had not allowed her to allude to what had passed. She had asked him what *they* (without naming any one) thought of it all, and he had merely said, he did not know; he had not yet seen Lady Strathstone, and so she had better not talk about it.

“I have no doubt she is mad,” said Sir George.

“Mad! my dear Sir, she is as sane as you or I.”

“Nonsense, Smith, who but a mad woman would have committed such acts?”

“We must, however, make sure of that, and also endeavour to discover her motives, mad or not,” rejoined Dr. Smith. “Is the baby found?”

“Not yet. I have had the place searched, but can find no traces. The dog must have carried it off, but oh God! I trust it will yet be found, or what a fearful thought presents itself! I would have had the creature shot instantly, but still think he may in some way assist us in finding it; but I cannot see him without the most revolting feelings.”

“Oh I do not fear anything of that nature, Sir

George, it is most improbable. He has, likely enough, carried it off and hidden it somewhere:—could not his foot-marks be traced?”

“No, the snow was falling so thickly that even the deep ones Miss Bennett had made were nearly obliterated.”

“Of course his kennel has been well searched?”

“Oh dear yes! and every place about the yard, and I do not see where else he should have carried it. Oh no! it makes one shudder to think of it.”

“Well, but its clothes must be some where?”

“Yes, they may turn up some day.”

“To be sure,” cheerfully added the kind doctor, “and the child in them, there is not a doubt of it.”

Dr. Smith then left him to visit Lady Strathstone, whom he found in such a precarious state that he deemed it advisable to ask Sir George’s consent to his bringing another medical man with him. It was decided that he should telegraph immediately from Sibthorpe and bring Dr. Manning with him in the afternoon.

He did so, and as they drove together from the station he related all he knew of the events of the past twenty-four hours. Dr. Manning said: “I should have acted differently in one respect regarding the Governess; I should have turned sharp upon her and asked something about the child. An abrupt question often startles out an answer when more gentle means do not succeed.”

“Well, Manning, will you do it? Probably from a stranger it may also have more effect.”

They both visited Lady Strathstone first, and then proceeded to Sir George’s study to tell him what they thought of her case; Dr. Manning also mentioned his idea about Miss Bennett.

“Do anything, Manning; anything that will discover that poor child, and relieve my mind from that horrid fear that has possessed me.”

They went to the room adjoining that in which Miss Bennett was now placed, and Nurse Penn was called out to speak to them.

From her they learned that Miss Bennett was decidedly awake, and had looked about her several times as if conscious of some change.

Dr. Manning said, “You think she is really sufficiently sensible to know strangers? Would she know Dr. Smith from me?”

“Oh, dear yes, Sir! She asked for her clothes just now, and said she should dress, and go away at once; but I told her she must’nt stir till Dr. Smith had been to see her leg.”

Accordingly Dr. Manning proceeded to her room, leaving the communicating door open, that they might hear all that took place. He walked straight up to the bedside, drew back the curtains so that she might distinctly see him. She immediately opened her eyes, and coloured at seeing a stranger; but ere she had time to recover from her surprise, he

said, "Miss Bennett, what have you done with the baby?"

She stared at him for a moment, threw up her arms, then uttered a piercing shriek, with "Dead, dead, dead," and fell back on her pillow with her eyes tightly closed; and no expostulation, entreaty or threatening would induce her to speak another word. Dr. Manning left her with the words, "We shall see," and returned to Dr. Smith and the nurse.

"Well, what do you think of it now, Smith?"

"Undoubtedly that she has murdered the child."

Sir George could not think otherwise at the first moment, and felt relieved even by such a thought; but then the question arose, what had she done with it?

"It is what we must use great caution to discover; is it not probable she killed it ere she went into the arbour at all? Perhaps it is secreted in the house somewhere all the time," was Dr. Manning's suggestion.

But that fell to the ground, for Sir George had had every corner well hunted.

"Perhaps it is not dead after all;" said Dr. Smith. "Where was she going? for she must have had some cottage she was making for at such a time, and she may have carried it there first."

"No, that is not more probable; because her foot-steps, if you remember, were traced direct from

our dining-room window to the trees, but only one way and no farther."

The gentlemen were obliged to part, leaving the mystery unraveled.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIAL.

THE next day, (Sir George being a magistrate,) it was thought expedient to have a proper examination in case Miss Bennett's illness should take a turn, and she again become delirious, or put her threat of escape into execution ; for, after all she had already done, they could not feel sure of anything. She was allowed to get up ; and, dressed in a loose wrapper, she was laid on a sofa in the adjoining room ; but the object of all this preparation was carefully kept from her, and Nurse Penn never left her for a moment. About one o'clock Dr. Smith arrived, accompanied by Mr. Hartfield, another magistrate.

They were shown into the large dining-room, where Sir George was ready to receive them ; and he then had the servants assembled there to inquire into their version of the events of the night, ere going to examine Miss Bennett. Our readers already know as much of the facts as any of the witnesses.—After taking down the substance of it all, the three gentlemen proceeded to Miss Bennett's apartments.

She looked very astonished, and coloured deeply at seeing them, but did not attempt to rise.

They took seats opposite to her, told the nurse to put the table before them, with an inkstand, &c., and then to place herself at the head of the sofa.

Miss Bennett seemed to gasp for breath once or twice, but then became tolerably composed; far too much so for any one to be able to form the least idea of what might be passing in her mind.

Sir George addressed her first, in a kindly manner rather than otherwise; but at length his voice became so choked with emotion that he was obliged to desist.

Mr. Hartfield then spoke:—

“We are here, young lady, on business of a most distressing nature. You know it too well for there to be any use in my going through the form of explaining its object to you.”

She slightly bent her head, and he proceeded.

“In the first place, I would solemnly warn you that all which you may now say will appear for or against you at a future time; I would, therefore, simply recommend the greatest caution and truthfulness.”

After having arranged a sheet of paper, and dipped a pen in the ink, he looked at her and said,

“Will you, if you please, give me your full and correct name?”

She replied in a scarcely audible voice, “Maria Thorley.”

"Then the name you have made use of here has been an assumed one?"

"Yes—at least, no; not altogether; it was my maiden name."

"Then you are married?"

"Yes."

"May I ask how it is then that you are living away from your husband, and earning your own living?"

"Misery"—was all the answer she groaned forth.

"But with your means of making money (and I suppose he could in some way have helped you), you could not necessarily have been suffering from poverty surely?"

"Poverty!" repeated she, with a look of withering contempt: "Are you pretending to hold any office as magistrate or otherwise, and yet insinuate that poverty is the only misery you can think of? I pity you—you can know but little of the human heart, or you would know there is other misery than poverty; but no;—you are right, it is poverty—poverty of the heart!—a heart that is full of love, but has lost all its idols—a heart that is warm—warm as the summer sun of love can make it, but is surrounded, incarcerated in barriers of ice, that would freeze it and crush it, and must at last break it; God grant it may be soon!"—And large scalding tears chased each other slowly down her cheeks. One fell glistening on her marriage finger, but no pledge

of marriage shone there. She seemed suddenly to recollect something; turned to nurse, and in a whisper asked her to fetch her her dressing-case, which had been found by her side in the snow. The gentlemen sat mute the whole time, as though something extraordinary were about to occur.

She opened it, and slowly brought forth her ring and a small paper, which she handed to Mr. Hartfield.

"Read that," said she, "those of you that doubt my lawful marriage: I will not have a slur cast on the fame of Henry's wife."

And whilst they merely glanced at the marriage certificate, she replaced the ring on her finger.

Her remarks seemed to have so surprised her examiners that they had nearly forgotten the real object of their visit, until Sir George whispered, "But the child?"

Mr. Hartfield then said, "Now, Maria Thorley, you must acquaint us with all you know of your proceedings on that fearful night, and with what you have done with the infant?"

She immediately resumed her rigid look, and closed her mouth and eyes as determinedly as before.

Finding they could not get any sort of a reply, they tried persuasion, nay entreaty, for the sake of Sir George, who sat in an agony of suspense.

She only again ejaculated, "Dead, dead, dead."

Sir George gasped forth, "Did you kill it?"

“I!” said she, “Oh, my God, to think any one would suppose I could do such a thing!”

No more could be obtained from her; poor Sir George felt now that his worst fears were realized, and staggered from the room.

Mr. Hartfield then proceeded to inform her that she would be committed for trial on the charges of murder and incendiarism, that (unless the child were found, so as to clear up any mystery relating to that, in which case she would undergo a severe cross-examination at the inquest), she would, as soon as her health permitted, be removed to gaol to await the next assizes. She said, in a deep, determined voice, “Never—no, never!” but would say no more.

They then left her room, and Mr. Hartfield considered it necessary that she should be closely watched day and night, more particularly at night, and by more than one person.

CHAPTER X.

SUICIDE.

As soon as the gentlemen were gone, and the excitement was over, poor Miss Bennett felt the reaction. She was very exhausted, and told Nurse Penn that she should like to return to her own room and lie on the bed ; she felt more at home there, more free from intrusion, and she should be quieter.

Nurse immediately acceded, (why should she not ?) and helped her to fulfil her wishes. Once there, she asked Nurse Penn to leave her, as she would rather be alone, and after she had rested awhile she would write a letter.

The nurse knew her injunctions far too well to think of leaving her alone ; and yet, did not like to appear to act as a spy, by remaining in the next room unknown to her, so she replied :—

“ Well, Miss, I can leave you certainly, but I do not exactly know where else to go ; should I discommode you anyways, if I do stay in the next room and work ?”

“ Oh no, decidedly not, nurse, thank you.”

She lay on her bed and rested for nearly half an hour, and then rose to write her letter.

We shall not peep over her shoulder; we have our honourable feelings as well as nurse; and do not like to appear prying; moreover, we shall have a right to read the letter in due time. *Patienza!*—it “turns a mulberry leaf into satin,” and many wonders besides!

It was now about four o'clock and getting dark; she called to Nurse Penn for a light, which was brought, and she continued her letter.

Presently a strong smell of burning caused nurse to peep in, and inquire what occasioned it. (She might surely be setting fire to the house again, as she had done so already.) She replied that she was only burning a few old letters which she had been looking over. On the drawers lay one folded and sealed, but the address was turned down; near it was a brown paper parcel, a box it looked like, done up and directed, but nurse could not read the writing.

“La’s, Miss, what for do you bother yourself with your packing? I could ha’ done up that parcel as nice as ever you have. I am a handy body, Miss, at them kind o’ things, becource since my husband did used to keep a shop, and I did used to do up all the parcels and such like for him.”

“Thank you, nurse, that was not much trouble; it is only my dressing case, which I always carry in my hand, in case my luggage should get lost, consequently I always put anything I value in it.”

Nurse returned to her room, but not without

having noticed a peculiar smile in the corners of her patient's mouth, and an excited, wild look in her bright eyes, which was increased by the feverish colour on her cheeks ; so much so, that she felt sure fever was returning, and prepared a cooling mixture.

About eight o'clock she went in with her tea, and found her sitting, apparently quiet, by the fire ; but as nurse entered, she jumped up with a sudden start, and exclaimed : " Never, no never."

She was quite sure she was going to have a relapse, so said, in a soothing tone :

" My dear, what makes you jump so ? you'll hurt that poor leg of yours : if I was you, I'd just get to bed as fast as I can ; you've a been so ill, and do look so tired like now."

" Never, no never," was all the answer, and she strove to push nurse away.

However, she gained her object, and got her to bed, and then tried to persuade her to take the medicine.

She shuddered as nurse put the glass to her lips, and said :

" How long will it be, nurse ?"

" How long will what be, Miss ?"

" Why how long will this be before it takes effect ?"

" Oh, my dear, why a'most directly."

" So soon ?" And she looked wildly round.

" Well, at any rate *they* won't have me ; when are they to come ?"

“Who, my dear?”

“Who? Ah well, never mind, it will soon be all over, and I have put everything ready; and at any rate—there will be no disgrace for Henry and Annie—anything, anything rather than the trial.”

Nurse saw how wandering she was becoming, so only said:

“Come, my dear, do drink this.”

“Oh yes, nurse, you’ve always been kind to me; but I did not think you would bring it.”

“My dear Miss Bennett, do drink it, it will do you good; it will make you rest so quietly.”

“Yes, yes—no one can disturb that rest;—is it very nasty?”

“No, my dear—now take it, there’s a dear.”

“What is it? laudanum? or something quicker?”

Nurse now began to see that she thought it was poison!

The poor girl took the glass as with a sudden resolve, drank the contents, and ejaculated, “Thank God, that now Henry and Annie will be safe,”—then sank back on her pillow in a sort of resigned-comfort manner, as if the peaceful end were indeed come.

Nurse thought she was going to sleep, so crept cautiously into the next room.

An hour afterwards, Jane joined her there, as they were to pass the night together as a watch. Nurse told her all that had passed, but added that she thought Miss Bennett was asleep now.

About midnight she looked at her again, and seeing her still lying quiet, returned to her own bed, and she and her companion were soon in the land of dreams.

Any invisible witness in Miss Bennett's room, would have seen and heard strange things!

About one o'clock she began to mutter great incoherencies.

"Ah! she has deceived me then!—I have waited long enough—four hours—anything must have taken effect in that time.—This won't do—*They'll* have me yet—Oh God, forgive me!—It is awful; but it must be done—I *cannot* bring Henry to shame—he never loved me, but I have loved, do love him, oh, only too much. And my sweet innocent Annie—she must never have to remember her mother with a blush—anything to save them."

And so she muttered on—her madness was very gentle and meditative this time. Revenge was not its root—only love, the safety of those she loved so deeply.

At length she crept softly out of bed, and went to the door of the next room; by their manner of breathing, she knew that her guards were sound asleep. She carefully put on her dressing gown and opened a drawer; it had nothing very particular in it, some handkerchiefs, gloves, &c., but there was a little paper parcel:—"Ah, *that* will do," said she. She unrolled it; it contained nothing but a piece of

ribbon, which she had bought long ago for new bonnet strings. Why does she look at it and feel it in such a peculiar way to-night? It is nothing extraordinary—broad, and black, and strong, and about two yards or so in length. She slowly repeated “Yes, that *will* do.” She looked all round the room as if in search of something else, but with the ribbon still in her hand. At last she seemed to discover what she was seeking, for she went behind the door, placed a chair, mounted it as well as her lame leg would allow her, and then tied the ribbon very firmly to an iron dress-hook, which was placed high up on the wall. She arranged the ribbon so that the part which hung loose, formed a noose or slip-knot. She pulled it once or twice to see if it would answer her intention, and cautiously descended from the chair. Oh, that it had slipped, or made any noise sufficient to awaken the living sleepers in the next room, ere she should sleep the sleep of death! But, no! she was far too careful for that.

She solemnly knelt down, and remained some minutes in prayer; rising from her knees, she looked at the letter on the drawers, then at the dressing-case, which was legibly directed to—

“CAPTAIN HENRY THORLEY,
To the care of Charles B. Smith, Esq.
Manager of the Colonial Bank,
Threadneedle Street.
London.

“Not to be opened by any one but Captain Thorley, for ten years, and if he do not claim it ere then, it may be opened by Mr. Smith.”

She went and looked at the deadly ribbon, pulled it again to be sure it was all right, and seemed almost to caress it as a friend who was to release her from all her trouble ; and yet with a sad, sad face. Then she knelt down before the nearly extinguished fire, and again muttered something about Annie.

In a few minutes, as with a sudden resolve, she walked steadily across the room, mounted the chair and adjusted the black ribbon safely, oh ! too safely, about her neck. When she felt sure it was all right for her melancholy purpose, she gave a deep sigh, softly murmured once more “Henry, Annie,” and with a desperate push sent the chair from her. Pity must draw a curtain over all uncharitable judgments that may arise on this sad act. Let us not attempt to judge her ; “to her own master she standeth or falleth,” and it is not for weak, erring mortals to decide the extent of God’s mercy to his fallen and falling creatures ; we may never have been so severely tried as she was ; then, let us be *thankful*, not harsh. Sorrow upon sorrow takes the *bravest* spirit out of any one ; and undoubtedly, suicide can never be looked upon but as an act of the greatest cowardice. It is trying, by a desperate and awful step to rush from the overpowering griefs of this world. The perpetrator can never be thought otherwise than deranged, at any rate at the time being. No sane

person would hasten into the presence of his Judge unbidden, if he possessed his senses for one moment to think of what he was doing. Oh, no ! let the trials or sorrows of life be what they may, they would be, *must* be bearable, in comparison to such a fearful step. The back is fitted to the burden.

Faith looks up and sees God's hand holding the balance, and as trials accumulate in the one scale, she knows that He will pour into the other, aye, and that liberally, strength sufficient to weigh it down. If they have not faith—still they *must* believe ; and if so, the counsel is short ; “ Ask of God who giveth to all men liberally.”

There must be no shrinking from duty or from the sorrows God sends. These latter may be punishments for wilful sin, wilful neglect of Him ; or they may be sent to try the strength of our faith, the stability of our trust in Him. Only, let us be sure they are of His sending ; not of our own creating.

It is cowardice which drives the maniac out of the world, it is cowardice which drives the nun into her cell, there to hide herself from the duties and afflictions which she has not the courage to perform or bear. Each alike is a want of faith in God's promises of help.

We know who said, in praying for His disciples and followers : “ I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.” Not the sorrow, but the sin that is evil. Sorrow is often the greatest blessing.

CHAPTER XI.

LUNACY.

BUT poor Miss Bennett's sorrows were not yet come to an end. She was yet to exchange the peaceful and quiet grave which she had sought for the living sepulchre. A sad exchange! The occupants of the next room, soundly as they slept, could not avoid being awakened by the noise made by the chair.

They sprang up immediately; and who shall describe their horror at the scene which now presented itself? We will not do so.

Life was not extinct, and with great presence of mind they cut the ribbon, and placed Miss Bennett once more in her bed, and restored her suspended animation.

Sir George was then called up, but he decided that nothing more could be done until the morning—Nurse Penn was not to leave her bedside for a moment.

Very early next morning Sir George sent a message to Sibthorpe to request Dr. Smith to come as soon as possible, and to bring Dr. Manning and Mr. Hartfield with him.

Accordingly, about 11 o'clock they arrived. He briefly told them all that had passed during the night: they requested to see the nurse in order to learn from her the present state of the patient.

Jane took nurse's place by the bedside whilst the latter was closely questioned. She said she had not left Miss Bennett's room a moment since Sir George saw her there. She had called to Jane to bring her clothes in, that she might dress herself, as she only had on her night things; that, for some time after Miss Bennett was put into bed, she kept making strange noises in her throat, and putting her hands up as if to loosen something tight about her neck; that after about an hour she left off doing so, and then began talking to herself a great deal, but quite wandering like, and at length became more and more excited: that now she seemed quite in a raving state, screaming at times to some one not to let *them* come near her, and starting up in bed as if fighting some one off, and that she was got so bad that, as nurse added, "she were quite thankful to come out of the room for a bit."

The gentlemen decided that they had better go up to her room, and if (as they anticipated) she was really gone out of her mind, the necessary forms could then be drawn up in the presence of the two magistrates and the two medical men, to send her at once to an asylum.

They found it beyond a doubt, and she seemed

rapidly getting so much more violent that Dr. Manning suggested taking her away immediately, if Sir George would lend his close carriage for the purpose. Nurse and Jane had the greatest trouble in getting her to leave her bed at all, for she kept shrieking, "No, they can't dare to take me out of my bed ! I can't go to a trial in my night dress !"—and altogether, Dr. Smith, who had remained in the adjoining room, told them only to put on her dressing-gown, &c., or whatever was easiest, and take plenty of wrappers in the carriage with her, and her box of clothes. His voice probably calmed her, for she submitted to this proceeding tolerably well.

We will leave them : it was too sad a scene to witness even in imagination. Of course she had to be taken down stairs and placed in the carriage by force, as she insisted that she would not stir to her trial to disgrace Henry and Annie, and many more such ravings.

She was put in the close carriage with Nurse Penn and the two medical gentlemen, and every provision had been made for her comfort. Mr. Hartfield followed closely in Dr. Smith's phaeton. They had about twenty-seven miles to drive : the railroad would have considerably shortened their journey, but it would have been attended by many difficulties, owing to the necessary changes of carriages, &c. and they knew it was better to keep her as quiet as possible.

Sir George went to his wife's room to tell her partly what had occurred, but not any of the painful events of the night. She was quite thankful to learn that Miss Bennett was really gone; and as he said Nurse Penn had gone with her, this (at times) not too inquisitive lady was satisfied.

She was much altered; severe illness had lowered her high spirit, at the same time that it took away her bodily strength; and the mysterious loss of the baby made her feel very wretched. She saw the hand of God in the whole transaction, and was sincerely repentant for her past thanklessness, and remembered her remarks with pain. Whether such feelings were to be lasting or not we shall not stop the rest of our story to inquire. When we once leave Moseley Hall, (and that will now be very shortly,) we shall hear no more of the inmates whom we shall leave there.

As Sir George left Lady Strathstone's room, Jane met him, and gave him the letter which we saw poor Miss Bennett write. She said Nurse Penn gave it to her, and also desired her to tell him of the parcel which was on the drawers in Miss Bennett's room. Dr. Smith had looked at the address on it, and told Nurse to leave it behind, and at the same time said he should return to Moseley that evening or early the next day.

Sir George looked at the direction of the letter, and seeing it was for himself he put it into his pocket

and ordered Jane to bring the parcel, which he then took to his own study and locked it up with the letter, preferring to read that when Dr. Smith should be with him. He expected that it would contain some fearful revelation about the missing child.

He prepared to go out, for he felt sure that a brisk walk on such a fine frosty day would be the best restorative to his shaken nerves.

He went across the lawn to the clump of trees (how many times had he already done so in the vain hope of discovering some trace, but a sigh bespoke his renewed disappointment), and he continued the same path towards the brook, meaning to ascend the opposite hill and come home by the village. When at some little distance on this side of the bridge which crossed the brook, he saw a little boy running towards the house, the back premises of which were reached by a different footpath. He called to him, and the boy came, but as he drew nearer he looked so frightened that Sir George called out hastily, "Come, Sir, what tricks have you been at? You may as well tell me at once."

The boy stood still, but did not speak.

"What were you going up to the house about?"

"Please, Sir, I—I—"

"Well, boy, what?"

"I wer goin to spake to someun—"

"Well, I suppose so; but to whom, and what about?"

“Sir—Sir! I *cannot* tell you.”

“Can’t tell me, boy! why not? I shall be sure to know it in time.”

Seeing the boy look still more scared, and not able, or not intending to say a word, Sir George changed his tone.

“Now, my little man, just tell me what’s up: I dare say nothing so very bad. Have you broken the bridge, hey?”

“Noo—noo, but—”

“Well, come, my boy, do let’s know; it is very cold standing still here.”

“Please, Sir—there be someut down there.”

“Something down there! well, let’s go and see:” and Sir George moved as if going on; but the boy in a moment, seemed to lose all timidity, and resolutely planted himself before Sir George, exclaiming energetically:

“Plase, Sir George, doan’tce, Sir, doan’tce goo there; indeed yer massun’t.”

Sir George somehow had a sad foreboding: he said—“Oh! my boy, have you found—?” He seemed as if his very legs would support him no longer; and the large drops of perspiration ran down his face, notwithstanding the cold weather, of which he had complained just before.

“Ees, ees, now doan’tce goo, Sir,” said the boy.

Sir George sat on a heap of stones close at hand; and in a few moments rallied, and said, “My good

boy, thank you very, very much ; you are a brave, kindhearted little fellow, and I shall not forget you, I would rather go myself ; but just first tell me all about it."

The boy related how he was standing on the bridge, throwing stones to try and break the ice, which was thick on the brook, when he saw a heap of snow on the bank, which looked as if there was something under it, and his little dog Tip, which was with him, at the same moment went barking at the heap, and scratching away the snow. He called Tip off, scrambled down the bank directly, and then saw some clothes protruding beyond the snow, and on scraping it away with his hands, he found a little baby, but oh ! so small and white, and blood all about it.

"Thank God !" ejaculated Sir George, as if greatly relieved, which of course surprised the boy.

Sir George noticed his look of astonishment, and then told him that they knew the baby was dead, but that they had lost it, and he had had dreadful thoughts as to what could have become of it, and that he was most thankful to have found it again.

They proceeded together to the brook, and there lay the infant, just as the boy had described it, and his dog Tip lying quietly by, evidently guarding it.

"Weren't you afraid to leave your dog with it, my boy ?"

"Oh noo, Sir, I just told im to watch, and Tip

would ha' laid as still as that for hours, and not ha' let no un come anerst it, for ever so !”

“ Well now, my good little fellow, will you go up to the house and ask gardener to come down here with you, and to bring a large basket or shawl with him ; but do not say a word more to any one, for fear they should go up and frighten Lady Strathstone, for she is very ill.”

The boy did as he was ordered, and literally would not say a word more, than to repeat his message to all inquirers and “ that’s what Sir George tould me to saay, and I wern’t to saay never a word moor to no one.”

There remains little for us to add.

The dog of course had taken the child down to the brook, but wherefore no one could divine. He had not injured it in any way ; the marks of blood were only in consequence of its fall from Miss Bennett’s arms into that which had flowed from her bitten leg. Dr. Smith saw it afterwards, and declared it his opinion that it had been suffocated in Miss Bennett’s arms ; probably not intentionally, but from her holding it too tightly, and all the air being so excluded, or it might have died instantly on the sudden exposure to such an atmosphere as that night had been after the suffocating heat—either way its death must have been without suffering ; it was too young for life to have struggled long.

Sir George did not feel the least disposed to renew

his walk : he sat quietly in his study, but had not the courage or even the wish to open the letter. He now knew all he cared to know, and should wait patiently for Dr. Smith's arrival in the evening.

He visited Lady Strathstone, and told her how and where the child had been found, judging that she would be as glad as himself at the discovery ; but she seemed not to have thought of it as he had done, and only said, " Poor little thing, I wonder how it got there ! perhaps Miss Bennett took it there and drowned it."

Dr. Smith did not come that night. The carriage came back, and in it Nurse Penn, just to tell Sir George all that had occurred, before she took her final departure.

Dr. Smith came pretty early next morning, and said he was commissioned by the manager of the Ashton Asylum to inquire of Sir George if he knew anything of Mrs. Thorley's pecuniary affairs ; whether she had any resources beyond what she earned. (We shall henceforth speak of her as Mrs. Thorley, it is her real name, and she was entered at the Asylum under it.)

Sir George said he knew nothing whatever ; of course her rejecting her salary would look as though she had money of her own elsewhere, but then that might have only been another act of her insanity ; undoubtedly, there must be some great mystery attached to her altogether ; and then he named the

letter and parcel he had received the previous day from Jane. He reached them out of the closet to which he had consigned them. They both read the address on the parcel, and agreed that they had certainly nothing to do with that, further than to forward it safely to its destination.

They then turned to the letter, and sat down to peruse its contents.

It was directed to Sir George, and the contents were as follows :—

“ Dec. 25th.

“ Sir,

Ere you read this letter the writer will be no more ! I shall have taken sure means to terminate a life which has become a misery to myself, and if prolonged will be a disgrace to those most dear to me.

You know that I have a husband ; that we are parted—further than that I need not divulge.

I am also a mother, and I glory in that sacred name. I am also parted from my precious child ; but my affection for both is as deep as ever—as deep as possible, which will I think be proved by the action I am now contemplating for their sakes.

Pride and stubbornness on my part, and not submitting to my husband’s will, (as I had vowed to do at God’s altar), was the sole cause of my misfortunes—my misery.

I, alone, deserve punishment, and on me, alone, I trust it has fallen. I hope and pray that he may never feel one moment's unhappiness for the loss of one who was never worthy of him.

And I pray that God may never visit my sins on the head of my innocent little girl.

Where is either husband or child at present, I know not. He deprived me of our infant, telling me, I need feel no uneasiness as to her well-being, as he should provide for her amply and that he should go abroad.

I do not wish you to imagine that I shall cost you a single penny by the favour I am about to ask, I should wish to be buried as decently as possible; I am aware that by the act I am about to commit, I shall forfeit my right to sepulture in consecrated ground; but I should like the spot to be marked by a plain stone with my full name upon it in case my husband should ever seek my grave.

The name to be engraven as follows.

MARIA THORLEY,
born at Barnstaple, May 7th, 1800,
died at Moseley Hall, Dec. 25th, 1834,
daughter of James and Maria Bennett.

And I wish the same notice of my death to be entered in the "Times," the "Shipping Gazette," and an Australian and Tasmanian Journal. This, as I said, will cost you nothing, if you will send the account to the Banker to whom the brown paper parcel is

directed ; but if you will grant a dying woman's request and have it all attended to, you may feel entitled to the gratitude I shall not live to evince.

I should naturally have asked the favour of Lady Strathstone, but her heartlessness and hauteur prevent my seeking or accepting any sympathy from her.

The Banker above alluded to has plenty of money in hand of mine, as I have an income of £200 per annum : and I have not drawn a penny of it for upwards of two years, being the time my husband left me ; it is his, and I will never touch it. If he refuse to use it, it will accumulate for our little Annie.

Now a few words about your own ill-fated baby.

As far as you are concerned I am deeply grieved for what I have done. I hope circumstances will yet arise to convince you that I did it no harm ; I would not have hurt it for worlds ! I was goaded on to steal it by Lady Strathstone's conduct and wicked remarks ; she said she had too many already and wished she had only half the number, before the birth of this one to which she looked forward with regret. She did not want more, and I did so want *one* to love and keep instead of my own. Oh ! I should have loved it, far more than she could. What became of it I cannot say. I set fire to my room, as that would create an alarm in the house while I escaped, and then I took baby and kept it tight and

warm in my bosom until I reached the trees ; but how I got there I do not remember or what happened, excepting that Briton flew at me. Beyond then I know nothing, until I found myself in bed again, and had it not been for the bite in my leg, I think I should have only fancied I had been dreaming. I awoke too soon to the reality—I awoke to hear myself accused of a crime I had never committed. I saw in a moment the consequence of the trial to which I was doomed—disgrace to my husband and child. I quickly determined what to do. I must and will suffer anything to save them. In this world it is not much, but, oh ! the future !—Still I trust in God’s mercy ; do not say it is a false trust. I do not love them more than Him, but still far too much to let them bear disgrace for me. My resolution is taken, and ere twelve hours are past my earthly sufferings will be over. I do not fear that my courage for the act will fail me, but I do fear that in the contemplation of it my mind may give way, and then I may not do it. I do not know how to pass the few remaining hours with that fate before me—and yet it must, it *shall* be done.

MARIA THORLEY.”

Sir George was greatly overcome when he had finished reading the melancholy effusion.

“ Poor girl,” said he, “ God forgive us, for indeed, Smith, I feel to a great degree, that we should have been guilty of her death, and even the alternative is almost worse, excepting for the hope that she may

recover. If she had received some kindness from us, all this might never have happened."

"Sir George, we must not judge ourselves too harshly. Events are all in God's hands; kindness and sympathy, and a little more sociability on Lady Strathstone's part might have soothed her; but my firm opinion is that her mind has not been in a sound state for some time, probably since her husband's desertion, and it is hard to bear severe trials, such as she must have experienced, without God to help and support us. She may yet recover reason, but I do not think it very likely. She has not the prospect of a happy home, or relations to receive her if she should ever be able to leave the asylum, or that would have a great effect in curing her; as it is, if her madness subsides into an idiotic state, she will be almost better off, than for reason to awaken again to the knowledge of her sorrows."

"Smith, I shall make it my duty to discover all I can about her, and I will exert my very best endeavours to trace out her husband and child. If I find them together I think there will be little difficulty, after such proofs of devotion as she has given, in convincing him that he must receive her home again if she recovers. If I only find the child, this shall be its home, at any rate until her mother can have her again. I think the better way will be to take the parcel myself to the Banker and learn as much as I can from him; probably he knows all."

“It would certainly be the wisest preliminary step, but I should not advise your making any arrangements as to the child too hastily; satisfy yourself as to whether she be really well cared for, and keep an eye on her well-being for the future, but I would not commit myself further; you do not know what sort of a man the father may be, or whether the tale may turn out to be true at all, and at any future time you can render assistance or take what notice of the child you please.”

“That is all true, Smith, two heads are better than one! I spoke from the impulse of feeling, without giving the subject due consideration. It might be attended with awkward or unhappy results in many ways to make her a member of this family. Besides, if it prove true that the mother has this annuity, she can never be in want, trustees must be appointed.”

“Also,” added Dr. Smith, “you must remember that the child is said to be provided for, so that provision, no doubt, is to continue until she is grown up, and from all circumstances I do not suppose she can now be above three or four years of age.”

“Suppose I cannot hear anything of them from this Banker? Shall I put any notice in the same papers with the announcement of her death so as to find the husband in that way?”

“I think not, I would rather leave such in the Banker’s hands for him to arrange, in case he hears

from the husband. I would really have you very cautious how you get mixed up in the affair; why he may come home and try to prove that all the wrong has been on your side, and that you acted so as to drive her to suicide and madness."

"Yes,—very well; I will take your advice and be very cautious; indeed I will take no decided step until I see you again to advise me still further. I will go to town as soon as Lady Strathstone is a little better; so, no doubt, I may be able to start next week."

CHAPTER XII.

WHO WAS THE WORST?

ALL Sir George's efforts to discover anything about Henry Thorley or the child were perfectly futile. He took the box himself to the Banker, sent in his card and requested a private interview, which was immediately granted.

He briefly recounted all that had passed whilst Mrs. Thorley had been an inmate of their house as Miss Bennett.

Mr. Smith stated that his knowledge of her was next to nothing, in fact he had never seen her at all, and her husband only a very few times. Capt. Henry Thorley had called on him about two years since, and opened an account at their bank in the name of Maria Thorley, who was to receive £50 per quarter, and that he had given all necessary directions for the dividends to be paid into their bank half-yearly : that his wife had full right to draw it as she pleased, quite independently of him. That he was then going to sell out, for he intended to quit the army and emigrate.

"I asked if I should take charge of his letters," added the Banker, "and enter his address : he said,

No, he had arranged all that with other parties, but that there might sometimes come a letter for his wife which was to be forwarded to her with her next remittance of money, and I have sent her two but she never gave me your address. Of course I thought all this had, as people call it, a look with it; but as it was no business of mine I said no more."

"But don't you know where the child is?"

"Child! I did not even know there was one!"

"Dear me! that is vexatious. However, this parcel I had better leave with you; you may yet see him again, so here is the poor wife's direction. If you do hear anything of him, I should esteem it a favour if you would send me his address. I should much wish to have an interview with him; mine you have."

"Your wishes shall be met with all attention, Sir George."

Here the gentlemen parted, and here we part from all the Moseley family; they have no more to do with those in whom we are interested. We will now give our readers a few particulars about this unhappy marriage and separation.

Captain Thorley of the 85th, was about thirty years of age; remarkably handsome, and prepossessing in his manners, accomplished more than most young men in his position; a good artist, and first-rate musician, and endowed by nature with a fine tenor voice, and we may say *consequently* passionately fond of music. He was in every way, a

dangerously attractive man to the fair sex. He was well aware (as what man is not?) of his influence over their susceptible hearts, and too often made an unfair use of it, to their discomfort, if not for their unhappiness. He was excessively extravagant, and somehow never could keep his creditor and debtor pages under any sort of amicable understanding. His grand object was money ; he should look for a rich wife, never mind any other requisite. If she were not good looking, he need not introduce her into society ; if she were ill-tempered, he would soon break her in ; if she did not make his home happy, he could spend her money at his clubs ; a man must be a poor fellow indeed, who could not manage to be happy with a rich wife, and comfortable too with her riches ! As to making *her* happy ! Why the very idea made him laugh ; how should she be otherwise with such a husband ; every thing that a girl could wish—and as self was his law, he never thought there was any duty in the matter.

So it was ;—he went into a great deal of society, and was attracted by many a nice girl, but on enquiry, found that if he were the magnet, she was not a golden loadstone, so it would not do.

At last it happened, that he was one evening struck by the tones of a most magnificent voice singing in a decidedly superior style, in the room adjoining where he was dancing ; as soon as he had conducted his partner to her seat, he sought the

music room. The song was over, and there was no lady near the piano; but he saw one surrounded by gentlemen, evidently complimenting her, so he rightly judged that she was the possessor of the charming voice. She was good looking, though not decidedly pretty or handsome. She was dressed very quietly in pale-blue silk, trimmed with lilies of the valley, and white tulle; her rich dark brown hair was beautifully braided and plaited, and she wore a blue velvet coronet, with a diamond star in the centre. She had a clear bright complexion, and a happy, sunny countenance; she seemed very collected and lady-like in her manner, and displayed a sort of calm gracefulness as she received the compliments which were being lavished upon her.

All this Captain Thorley leisurely noticed, and thought, "Yes, she will do, she looks very lady-like and presentable, *if* she has the needful."

On turning round, he saw one of his confidential friends standing close by, so addressed him with:

"I say, Dalton, will that be an eligible quarter for the sacrifice of my hand and heart? you know my terms—my handsome self for plenty of gold."

"Well, Thorley, I declare I think she will be the very one, if you are in time."

"In time, my dear fellow! unless she is going to be married to-morrow morning, I bet I'll be in time. A girl would be too wise not to turn anyone off for me."

“Well, Thorley, parole d’honneur, your conceit gets worse and worse; however, my dear fellow, if you have a mind I will introduce you, and wish you luck to ‘go in and win.’”

“Well, but Dalton, how about the needful?”

“Oh lots!——”

“That’s it then, come along.”

The friends crossed the room together, and the introduction took place which was to be productive of so much misery.

Captain Thorley soon led Miss Bennett into the dancing-room, and there used all his most fascinating arts to win her admiration; nor did he fail.

She was not so very young, but circumstances had prevented her initiation into all the chicanerie of fashionable society and flirtation. She had lived alone with her widowed father for the last four years, and as he was a great invalid, they led a very retired life. About a year before the time of which we are writing, a rich relative had died, and left a fortune of between thirty and forty thousand pounds to him for his life, and then to go to his child. He then felt it his duty for his daughter’s sake to enter the world again; besides which, he hoped to see her comfortably and happily married during his own life; it would deprive death of one of its sorrows.

He consulted a well-known solicitor as to the safe investment of the money, and left it all to him to settle, for he said he was too old now to enter into business.

A lady who had been his wife's intimate friend, and had had the surveillance of Maria's education, undertook to chaperone her to balls and parties, and as she moved in good society, the offer was gladly accepted by Mr. Bennett; this evening was almost her first appearance. Captain Thorley, therefore, happened to be the first gentleman who strove to win Miss Bennett's heart, and with all his attractions, as we have said, he was successful; but no heart did he purpose giving with his hand. In fact, it must professedly have been disposed of so often, that he was in every sense of the word, heartless.

When a very short time had elapsed, during which he made the most of his time and advantages, he proposed to her, and she, of course, like a good girl as she was, referred him to papa. However, he first obtained the avowal from her that she should make no objection.

Mr. Bennett had quite made up his mind that position and a good character should be the requisites for his son-in-law, and for nothing else should he thwart his child's wishes respecting her marriage. The former Captain Thorley possessed, and of the latter nothing disreputable could be heard. He was extravagant, but there would be plenty now for him to spend. As to his religious character, principles, disposition, or tastes, no one thought of inquiring! No; it was a marriage of the present day in every respect, so who could wonder that it turned out as miserably as they do.

They were married after a very few months from the time of their first meeting. ; all went on smoothly. He made, apparently, a most devoted admirer, and of her sincere love there was not a doubt.

Mr. Bennett insisted that all her money should be settled on herself; for, as he said, a naturally extravagant young man would soon make ducks and drakes of it, and yet have none of them to eat.

I am afraid that I cannot even record that the honeymoon passed without a drop of vinegar being instilled into it, and, ere six months were over, the disagreements became disputes, and the disputes, quarrels.

Captain Thorley soon showed he had only married for money, and now found that even that was not to be had at all times, and in all quantities. Mr. Bennett allowed them eight hundred a year, but the rest could not be touched during his lifetime.

Maria soon felt disappointed. Her idol was broken: she loved and doated on her handsome husband still, but she felt the increasing want of some affection in return, and he had none to give.

She was proud and of a hasty temper, and would often in their quarrels say things about her money, and her having brought him luxuries with it: a meanness of which she afterwards felt heartily ashamed (for she was too proud to stoop to meanness;) but what availed the sorrow? he knew nothing of it! In her own room were shed those bitter tears.

and were uttered those self-reproaches which her false pride made her hide from his eye and ear. At length their union was blessed (?) by the birth of a little girl.

The young mother was undoubtedly delighted, and in the excessive fulness of her joy, whispered in his ear, as he bent over the new-born child, "Now, Henry, are we not happy? we will continue so, and this darling shall serve as a screen to hide our faults from each other."

The Captain cared little about the quarrels, so with a cold, "Well, dear, with all my heart," by which he simply meant nothing, he left his wife—and thought, "Now, I shall be able to amuse myself more, as she will be contented to stay at home with her bantling, and not want to go everywhere with me. After all a wife is a horrid tie; I wish I could have had her money without her, but I always was an unfortunate fellow."

Maria felt that his words were only "light as air," and that she had no hope of ever regaining his heart: in fact, she now began to realize that she never had possessed it.

As she returned to the usual routine of life, the quarrels recommenced; she fancied it was of no use to try to lessen them if he did not. She forgot "the soft answer that turneth away wrath," and that as she had vowed submission, she should at any rate have tried its effect.

So the quarrels, as we said, recommenced, and became worse and worse. More violent words ensued, and one day she said, "You know if you had not married me you would have had no money beyond your pay, and I *need* not give it you; you have to thank me for it all." In a moment he retaliated: "You stop a bit, young Lady. Your old father is not going to live so very long, and then we shall see if you won't give me a good round sum, and I'll make you glad to do it too!"

Mr. Bennett did not live much longer. About a year after the birth of the child he had a paralytic attack, from which he rallied for a few months, and then came a second. The Thorleys were on the continent at the time, but hastened home directly. The *affectionate* husband thought he had better accompany his wife, and make a little appearance of the love he did not feel; the old gentleman might make him a present ere he died, or if not, unless he were on the spot, he might lose all chance of obtaining any money from his wife whilst the affairs were being settled. After all it was only one of the many means of obtaining money under false pretences.

When they reached London they found the third attack had quickly followed upon the second, and Mr. Bennett was too near his end to be able to recognise either of them. Maria, in real grief for a father she had always fondly loved, did not leave his bedside for a moment until he had ceased to exist:

then she felt that she had indeed a husband, but not one who would help his wife by words of fondness and endearments to bear her first sorrow. She remained "alone with her grief" until the morning, and then almost clung to her child for comfort. Yes, she yet had one object to love, and who would love her in return!

At the expiration of the week the funeral took place; the attendance was not large, but there was as much pomp as money could command.

The party returned from the cemetery, and the usual form of opening the will was gone through.

It was not long, and very clear—no chance for the lawyers through any misunderstanding of its contents.

It stated that as his daughter was so handsomely provided for, he should leave his own money, which had not in any way accrued from the legacy, to his sister, who had a large family, and a very limited income. That by the advice of Mr. Sharpe, his solicitor, he had invested the £37,000. in Deane's Bank at Bath, and that there it now was, with a large accumulation of interest, which had proved far beyond his requirements. This business ended, Captain Thorley asked Mr. Sharpe to fix a time for him to call at his office to settle everything so that his wife and he might return to Paris as quickly as possible.

Mr. Sharpe said he thought a week must elapse,

as he was so busily engaged at present that he feared he could not have the papers ready earlier.

“Very well then, let it be this day week ; but, bear in mind, I shall have everything arranged so as to leave town next day.”

“I will be ready for you, Captain Thorley,” and the party dispersed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SURE SINKING FUND IS A LAWYER'S POCKET.

THAT day week Captain Thorley was true to his appointment, but we cannot say as much for the lawyer.

The clerk informed the Captain, that his master had left town that day week by an evening train, but did not say for how long, nor had he left any address for his letters to be forwarded to him anywhere.

Captain Thorley was at first surprised, and then began to feel rather uneasy about it.

He asked several questions in order to procure, if possible, some clue to where the confidential lawyer could be, or what he was gone about, but they elicited no satisfactory replies:—it would not do for confidential lawyers to be talking over their client's affairs with their clerks! The young man absolutely knew nothing: he said, "Mr. Sharpe came home here this day week from a funeral, and after putting away his hat-band, gloves, &c. he locked up his drawers and desk, took his travelling bag with

some papers in it, and told me he was obliged to go into the country for a few days on particular business, and did not exactly know when he should return."

"Stranger and stranger," thought the Captain.

"I will go at once to Bath."

He left the office and hurried home; an extraordinary step for him, but the thought struck him that for once he had better hear what his wife thought of the matter. She was as much surprised as himself. It was possible that the lawyer might have been called away, but a week had now elapsed, and he might, and should have written. She must confess she did not like the appearance of the whole affair at all. The more they talked it over the more convinced they were that there was something wrong: still that could in no way affect them, as he had nothing to do with the money: that was safe enough in the bank. Perhaps, to make things quite certain he had better go to Bath to see if the business could not be settled without him? but, at Mrs. Thorley's suggestion, a letter was written first. To their amazement, and we may add horror, an answer came informing them that the Bank had stopped payment the preceding day. That a Mr. Julius Sharpe had placed a sum of money, amounting to £35,000, in their hands, about two years ago, and had received the interest thereof regularly ever since. That circumstances over which they had no control

had brought them into difficulties by which their credit in the money market was shaken some months ago, and that Mr. Sharpe's suddenly withdrawing that sum about a week since had occasioned their present misfortune, for they were only able to meet his demands with £25,000. They deeply regretted it, but trusted they might yet be able to give him £5000 more at different times. They were sorry they could not furnish Captain Thorley with any other address than his offices in Southampton Buildings.

Here was utter ruin now facing this *happy* pair ! We will not say that Captain Thorley had the heartless cruelty to reproach his wife with her poverty just yet. They went into a very quiet lodging to think over what was best to be done ; and by the aid of a solicitor of honest report, they found that means could be yet taken to secure the £5000. to Mrs. Thorley, if it really were ever paid ; but he knew too much about Deane's affairs to hold out hopes of more than a quarter of that sum.

But the one-sided love, although it shone forth in their trouble in truly womanly style, could not last for ever—recrimination soon recommenced, and then grew worse and worse. The wife had lost her only subject of bitter taunt. She felt now that she was the dependant on her husband, and severely did he make her feel it ; everything that was required for herself or the child was given grudgingly, and with abusive words : what hours would she sometimes

pass in thinking how to make her request, so as to give the least offence ! And yet when he had wanted money (she knew not for what, and it was well she did not), how readily she had given it, to her last sovereign, and had sometimes even written to her father for more ; not for herself, no, but had done anything for him ; aye, even sometimes to stooping to frame false reasons for the want of an additional hundred pounds.

From this time he would be away from home for days together, she knew not where, but we cannot add she cared not. Alas ! she did care, and that most bitterly. He got money somewhere and somehow, for she would frequently see a good handful of gold and silver, when he would give her two or three pounds, with more than their weight or worth in insult and reproaches for the expense she was to him.

At times he would reprove her for not exerting herself to add to their income by “ the fine voice she was so proud of, and which she had used successfully enough in catching him for her husband ;” but at her slightest proposal to do so he would get quite enraged at her for her want of respect to him ; “ indeed, was he going to allow her to degrade him, would he stand to be pointed at as a public singer’s husband ; no, he was not quite so lost to all feeling of respectability as that.”

Then he would threaten to leave her, and she

would get angry and dare him to do it ; at any rate he could not take her child.

“ How like a simpleton you talk,” said he one day, “ pray what is to prevent my doing so ? ”

“ Why, *I* will,” said she ; “ the law gives me my child until it is seven years old.”

“ Well, my sweet wife, but suppose I take the child and myself off, pray how is your law going to give you your child then ? ”

This appeared too true, she squeezed and kissed the child, and burst into hysterical weeping : “ Oh, Henry, Henry, you could not, would not do it, you are not so cruel as that, you are only teasing me, and it is so unkind : ”—and for a moment her temper succumbed again to her love for her husband.

“ Well, I don’t say what I would or could do, or not do, only I advise you to look to yourself, and be more guarded in your fine threatenings in future, or on my honour I will pretty soon let you see who is to be master, and what I will do for you, Madam ; so don’t be giving me any more of your false tears, they won’t do any longer.”

She instantly flamed up again with :—

“ Very fine, Sir, and I dare you to do it ! for what would you do with her after all ? and see if I would’nt trace you out.”

He grew white with rage, and stammered rather than said,

“ So, Madam, that’s it, is it ? now you have

done it, very well, now you *shall* see, I can tell you."

He took up his hat and walked out, banging the door after him so as to shake the whole house.

That bang went straight to Maria's heart ! In a moment the truth flashed upon her ; she rushed to the window, but just saw him with hasty strides turn the corner leading out of the square into the main street. She sunk on the sofa, sobbing and ejaculating, " Too late, oh, too late ! why *did* I say it !" She continued to sob and upbraid herself for her stupid passion, as she could now call it, and for the last speech, unheeding the fondling and caresses of the little girl, who kept coaxing her face with her tiny hands, and saying, " Naughty Papa, to scold my dear Ma, I won't love naughty Pa."

In time her grief subsided, and then she began to think after all there might not be so much to fear. " He was only in a passion, and most likely will do nothing ; he so often threatens, and when he returns I will be quite calm, and show him that I think nothing of what he said, only I do wish I could cure my temper."

Alas ! she did not seek the power to do so at the only source of all strength for such combats !

How often are good resolutions made or acted upon after the offence has been committed just *the once* too often, and all chance gone. It was so now ; Captain Thorley did not return for more than a week.

She was not much surprised at first, as he had staid away so often of late ; but, as day after day passed and he did not come, she began to grow uneasy, and to think that he really had deserted her. She wondered if he were still in London, and began forming a sort of ideal plan of going to his club in disguise to inquire ; but she had no occasion to do so. One evening he came back in a very altered manner—altered for the worse ; he had evidently been drinking too much. How her heart now smote her afresh to see her handsome, her once adored husband sunk to such a vice.

He threw himself on the sofa, heedless of his muddy boots, and asked his wife in a dictatorial manner if she had any brandy in the house ?

She replied in the negative.

“Then I shall send for some,” and he rang the bell furiously.

“Henry,” faltered she, “I have no money, it is of no use to send.”

“When I ask you for money again, Madam, you shall give it me. Thank God that day is past, I have plenty of my own now, so mind your own business if you please.”

She said no more ; her new resolution was strong, but the tears filled her eyes, and she thought that would vex and irritate him, so she took little Annie away to put her to bed. And then she wept abundantly and was relieved by it. She returned to their

only sitting-room, but he took no notice of her. At the usual time she retired to bed, but he spent the night in an intoxicated sleep on the sofa.

Next morning after breakfast, he told her that he wanted some things bought for him, as he was going to visit a friend in the country, and handed her a list of articles, which he always purchased in Regent or Oxford Street, and Holloway was far enough from them; he knew it would take her good three hours to get them. When she was ready to go, she said, "Perhaps I had better take Annie with me, she will be troublesome to you?"

"Oh no, leave her, it is too far for her, and if I want to get rid of her, she can play in the garden with Jane. Leave me your keys, as I want to get out my things and write a letter, and here is a five pound note, you can buy anything for yourself or her with what is left."

She was indeed surprised, and who knows what visions of future happiness she was forming.

She started on her expedition with a lighter heart than she had felt for a long time.

As soon as she was gone, Captain Thorley rang the bell, and told Jane to come upstairs with him to look out and pack all Miss Annie's clothes, as they were going into the country, and he had promised to get it all done during his wife's absence, who was gone to buy her a new hat, &c.

The little wardrobe was soon packed and his own

also, leaving very bare drawers to greet the poor wife. He then ordered the lunch to be brought, and as soon as the child had had her dinner, he said, "Now Jane shall fetch us a cab, and we will go and meet mamma."

"Is Ma to come too?"

"Oh yes, Papa, and Mamma, and Annie."

Whereupon she began to clap her little hands with delight.

They went off in the cab, and not until they were gone, did Jane at all think how strange it was if Missis was to go, that her clothes were all left behind.

In about an hour Maria returned, but she had not a moment's suspense. The instant Jane told her what her master had done, the awful stunning truth presented itself. She sank down senseless, which so frightened the girl, (who thought her mistress was dead,) that she shrieked with all her strength, and a policeman who was passing, vaulted over the little wall to see what was the matter. He called the girl all the names folly ever possessed, told her to help him to carry the lady into the house, and then he would fetch a doctor.

The nearest medical man soon arrived, but could make nothing out of Jane's story; he prescribed some soothing medicine, and finding his patient as far restored as she could be at present, he left, and said he would call again the next morning. He asked Jane if she knew none of the lady's friends

who could be sent for; Jane had only been there a very short time, and said she had never heard Missis speak of any, and no one ever came to see her; she was in mourning for her father, and that her husband was Captain Thorley, but he was very seldom at home, and when he was, "they quarrelled terrible."

The doctor soon guessed at the melancholy truth as far as the desertion, but why should the child have been taken?

He came as he had promised the next morning; poor Maria would gladly have prevented it, but the policeman had not returned, so they had had no means of finding out who was the doctor, or where he lived.

As it was, she was up and evidently suffering from some severe sorrow or misfortune. He delicately hinted at her illness being in consequence of some bad news, but he could get no enlightenment: only guarded, common-place remarks, such as, that all people have heavy trials at times; her servant was young and inexperienced, or she would not have been so easily alarmed at a person's fainting; she should not have had such an attack, only she was so overcome by fatigue, and had hurried home so fast.

At length he arose to take leave; she tendered him a guinea with a hope it was the right fee, and expressed herself grateful, &c. The doctor was quite sure from the general appearance of everything, that she was offering far more than she could well afford, and said it was double his charge, and took ten shillings.

As Jane opened the garden gate to show him out, a boy came up and gave her a letter ; she asked if there was any answer, he said, " No ; a gentleman gave it to my father yesterday, and told him to send it up to-day."

Jane took it in, and thinking it was only some circular, laid it on the table.

Mrs. Thorley was lying on the sofa, and as soon as the servant had closed the door, she got up to take the letter. It only assured her of what her heart already knew, that she was a widowed wife and a childless mother.

In the most heartless terms imaginable it told her the success of the deeply laid plot. Her husband had deserted her for ever. He had put the child out to nurse for three years, but under a feigned name, which he did not choose to divulge, so that she would gain nothing by seeking for her. He had sold his commission and should emigrate, but no one would know whither. But that she should have no cause to reproach him with leaving her in want, or with having squandered her money, so he had invested a sufficient sum to bring her in £200 per annum, which far exceeded what he had received of her, and the capital was to revert to the child at her death. As for how he had got the money, he should only inform her that she had rendered his home so miserable by her pride and bad temper that he had sought more agreeable society elsewhere,—he had been a successful gambler for

some time, and as an aged aunt had very recently died and left him five thousand pounds, he had found very little difficulty in doubling it,—that the money was placed in the Colonial Bank, Threadneedle Street, in her name, so that she could draw her annuity as she pleased,—that he had married her only for her money, he had never loved her, and she was but a poor silly fool to think he had—that now she had no more money for him he never cared to see her again, but did not even choose to feel he had ever been indebted to her, so took this means of squaring the account ;—that he had also provided for Annie until she should attain the age of eighteen ; that he had made every arrangement for her education, and that he should hear of her from time to time as her guardian, for that none of the parties with whom she would in future be linked, knew of the relationship existing between them ; that at those times he should also send a report of how she was to the Banker to be forwarded to her with her next remittance.

And so this poor girl's bright dream of love and happiness passed away. She felt only too sadly sure of the utter futility of attempting any inquiry. The child might not even be in England at all ! One thing she determined ; that such ill-gained money she would never touch. It should remain intact for her husband's use, whose she should still consider it, or for their child. She would earn a livelihood for herself ; and also hope for the five thousand pounds from

the Bath Bankers, which she really eventually got. She raised herself a sum nearly approaching £100, by the sale of many costly articles of bijouterie, which had only been purchased as the moment's fancy dictated when money was plentiful, but were not keepsakes or mementos of any particularly happy time or occurrence; so were in no way entwined with her affections. As the lodgings and Jane were only engaged by the week, she had no difficulty in leaving them whenever she should wish to do so, and she felt that the sooner she changed her abode the better. She went to another part of London, and soon procured pupils for singing lessons; but it was an uncertain means of supporting herself: when London was empty the pupils were so few that the earnings of the previous months had to be taken to defray present expenses. She therefore decided on seeking a situation as Governess in a family; through some of the many agents she heard of Lady Strathstone's, to which we have already taken her, and also followed her through the eventful six months of her residence there.

Hers was but one more instance of the frequent separations or divorces narrated in the daily papers, till one's very heart sickens at the thought of how many rational, responsible beings make shipwreck of their own happiness, through rushing into marriages which are quite unfit. "Be ye not unequally yoked together." How few are the young men or girls of

the present day, who solemnly, seriously, and prayerfully consider the vows they are going to take upon them, ere they link themselves for ever with another human being. How few of either sex remember that through life they will have to bear and forbear : that real earnest life will not be one long courtship ; the honey-moon must end, and the sorrows and anxieties begin which they are to help each other to bear with resignation and submission ; the temptations which they must strengthen each other to resist. It is an awful thought that "for ever ;" for it is no doubt most frequently a union affecting more than the weal or woe of this world. An old writer said, "No one ever goes to heaven or hell alone." Every one influences others for bad or good ; and in their turn suffers or profits by the influence of their associates. What must it then be in such an hourly influence as is thrown over each by the marriage tie.

Even as regards a peaceful life for this world only ; when the first disagreement arises, who tries to check it with the soft answer that turneth away wrath ? No, each goes on with a false idea of upholding his or her own right, until like a small fracture in a reservoir, the water begins to trickle through, then to run, until at last the breach becomes wider and wider, and the whole life of happiness pours forth in a torrent that cannot be stopped. The reservoir becomes a vacuum as far as concerns happiness ; but in its place quickly come the mud and weeds of dissension and distrust.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS MILLS IN PARIS.

WE must now ask our readers to go forwards again over the eighteen or twenty years we had taken them back.

We may forget Moseley Hall—we visited it eighteen years ago, and saw enough of its sorrows; we took leave of them all, and left poor Mrs. Thorley (whose early history we have just related) an inmate of a sad home! but it will only be for a time, and we shall hear of her again, and under more auspicious circumstances.

We will take up the original thread of our story, where we had left our friends at Eversfield.

The family were all reunited, after the vacation, with a new Governess; so we may leave them in the full enjoyment of domestic happiness, and accompany Miss Mills to Paris.

She found everything as it had been represented to her, at Madame Rey's. The first sight of that excellent lady was quite sufficient to win everybody's favourable opinion, and ere she had been long there, she became much attached to her.

In fact she so completely and immediately puts herself on the footing of a careful mother to the English who are placed under her charge, that, however prejudiced they may have been, in idea, against French people, they soon discover that there is one as warm-hearted, conscientious, and loving, as the best English woman who ever breathed.*

Miss Mills studied assiduously, the superior advantages of the Institution were not lost upon her; and at the same time she made acquaintance with several of the other English pupils, which afterwards ripened into lasting friendship.

She had been there about nine months, when she asked Mme. Rey to assist her in procuring a situation in France, as at the expiration of the year for which she was engaged there, she thought that by remaining two or three years more in the country, she should gain a thorough knowledge of the language.

A desirable situation was soon procured; it was at Rouen. A French lady was seeking for an English Governess, for two years, for her only daughter who was about eleven years of age. There were also two boys; one of whom was a sad little cripple, and had

* The writer is thankful for this opportunity of publicly expressing her grateful experience on the subject: on two occasions she passed many happy months with Madame Rey, reaping the advantages of her superior instructions, and those of her estimable head teacher.

been so from his birth; he was now about three years old.

Madame Girard had had advice for him, but with no successful results; but lately an English surgeon of some eminence, had expressed his decided opinion, that if he were taken to the Orthopedic Hospital in London, and submitted to the skilful treatment there, that he would be cured; but that, as it was a case of contraction of the muscles of the heel, success would be more certain, if it were postponed until he should be two or three years older. He advised his being an indoor patient for three months, but that Mme. Girard should reside as near as possible, so as to see him frequently.

It was therefore with this object in view that Miss Mills was to be engaged for two years to educate little Mariette Girard, and also to give her Mamma English lessons. The salary was not large; but French salaries always appear small in comparison with those given in England.

She was only to be daily Governess, going to her pupils at ten o'clock, taking her mid-day meal with them, which served as her dinner, and returning to her apartments at six o'clock. Altogether she preferred the arrangement, as it enabled her to keep up her own studies in the quiet evening hours.

She wrote to Mrs. Elton immediately that all was settled, as she was to decide at the end of the year whether she would return to them or not. Mrs.

Elton thought she had formed very judicious plans, and said she did not even now give up the idea of their coming together again, for she should be able to continue as they were for a year or two longer, but that she hoped Miss Mills would come and visit them some time. She added, "We have seen nothing of the beggar since you left, so you can come without fear of meeting her. I know our invitation is too late for this vacation, but you must, if all continue well, consider yourself engaged to come to us next summer."

She was very pleased at the receipt of this letter; it seemed the greatest pleasure she could have, to go once more amongst those who had been invariably kind to her; and she looked upon their continued friendship as a blessing sent by her Heavenly Father to comfort her in her forlorn condition.

We must not disguise the truth. She sought in vain for one special word about Reginald. Paris gaiety for nine months had not obliterated one remembrance of the happy days spent in Scarborough. She knew it was foolish to encourage such feelings, nor did she encourage them, but they would force themselves upon her in her solitary moments in spite of all her efforts to smother them. The thought would often, oh how often, creep in, "I wonder if he ever thinks of me!" If any little whisperer could have said "No," would she have believed it?—we suspect not, not even if it had been uttered in the loudest tones.

Still such was the case. His heart was given to another, and they were luxuriating in blissful hours of love, whilst she was pining for him in solitude. And yet we will not say pining; she had too much sense and strength of mind to pine over ideal happiness; she resolutely occupied her mind with other things.

She worked conscientiously and assiduously all day with her pupils, and studied by herself in the evening. She often drove out with Madame Girard in the afternoon, or took a stroll in the evening, admiring the many beauties of the neighbourhood of Rouen, and taking rough sketches to be filled in at her leisure, as remembrance of scenes she could not wish to forget.

Although no Romanist, she often found great comfort in spending some time in the peaceful grandeur of St. Ouen. In that vast and magnificent church she could lift her heart to God in prayer, and pour out her sorrows in the enjoyment of such quiet solitude as was not to be had in a house full of French lodgers; and she often retired there for that purpose, when she felt worn or worried by her day's work. Madame Girard liked her little English Governess better and better, and used frequently to insist upon her spending the evening with her. This had its advantages, for besides the pleasant change to Miss Mills, Madame Girard was thoroughly well instructed in her own language, (a branch of educa-

tion in which the French far excel the English,) and she often assisted Miss Mills in cases of grammatical difficulty.

Miss Mills in her turn used to have her young pupils to tea with her occasionally, and teach them English games, which delighted them exceedingly.

She continued very happy with them, and Mme. Girard at length told her that she hoped their engagement would not terminate at the expiration of the two years, but that she would accompany them when they should go to London and then return again with them to France. This was looking very far forward, so Miss Mills thanked her, but gave no decided answer. She had not yet been with them a year, and she thought she would form no plans for the future until after her holidays, which she was soon going to pass at Eversfield.

A few days afterwards she had a letter from Mrs. Elton, asking her to fix the time for her visit : she wrote—"Any day after the end of June, but I cannot well ask you earlier as our little house will be so full of visitors, for Reginald is now at home, having left Cambridge : instead of taking orders immediately, as we anticipated, he is going to travel for a year, not alone, but with a wife ! He is going to be married, June 25th, to a cousin to whom he has long been attached. If you were at Paris I should have arranged for you to see each other, but they will not be going *via* Rouen ; all other news, I shall reserve until we meet, and I feel sure we shall find much to tell each other."

Poor Girl ! Had her hopes then been growing all this time, notwithstanding her wishes and efforts to crush them ?

Otherwise what caused such a heavy, blank feeling of disappointment to fall on her heart as she read this ? She felt as though all the anticipated joy of her vacation was gone. Oh yes ! she should not mind what engagement she made with Madame Girard now ; anything rather than return to Eversfield to live, with the chance of ever seeing him another's husband ! Oh that she could avoid going now ! but that was impossible ; and, after all, as he would be away, it would be the best time : he and she had never been much together there ; no, it was at Scarborough, that delicious month which she now felt more than ever, she never could forget.

After giving way to these sad feelings for some time, she suddenly roused herself ; a feeling of shame came over her. To suppose that she could show such ingratitude even in thought, as to regret going to kind, good Mrs. Elton, because one of the family would be absent ! and worse than all, (it quite made her blush,) to think that she was acknowledging to herself that she deplored the marriage of one who had never asked or sought her love—it was unmaidenly, immodest. Oh how thankful she was that there was not, nor ever had been, any witness who could possibly guess such a thing ; no, the secret was hidden in her own breast, and there it should re-

main, and die; it would be easier to bear *this* sorrow alone; it was even a blessing now to be the solitary being she was. Determinedly did she resolve that no one should ever know it. She must write to Mrs. Elton, (and she would do it immediately,) fixing the time for the visit, and respectfully offering all the good wishes that gratitude could prompt under the circumstances. She reached out her writing materials, knowing full well that she had better act at once; penned her letter and then put on her bonnet to take it to the post.

As she returned she paid a visit to St. Ouen's Church. She had more sorrows to take there, and wanted to bring away comfort and strength from communion with God, and the assistance of His Holy Comforter. She was not disappointed. Who ever was that sought them at that unfailing source? She returned home peaceful if not happy; but, indeed she was happy to a certain extent, for she felt conscious that she had acted rightly; but she felt very, very solitary that night when she sought her pillow, from which henceforth she was determined to banish her only pleasurable thoughts, and at present saw nothing to take their place in her mind. No relatives, no friends; nothing but duty, hard duty; work and study; study and work: poor substitutes for Scarborough and pleasure; Reginald and love. Duty is an uncompromising master; he will not be served by halves, or he gives no satisfactory

feelings in return ; but as we have said she had a brave little heart, and once seeing what duty required of her, she braced her mind up to what she required of it. She read more, and studied more, and visited Mme. Girard more of an evening ; in fact doing everything to avoid solitude, even in occupation ; she put aside the needle-work she had been accustomed to : *that* gave thought too much chance to wander, and admit forbidden visitors. Music was scarcely safe ; but she could manage to keep her attention to any book she was reading, and for that purpose selected some interesting light reading, which would lead her on unawares ; otherwise she seldom afforded herself time for novels.

She was rewarded, for she found herself gradually getting reconciled to Reginald's being lost to her. She should never love another ; she felt she could not, and with her peculiarly firm mind and heart it was not likely she would. Her affections partook of the stability of her general character. She began to think of him as one does of a deceased friend. It would have been like sacrilege to have admitted any one else to the same place in her heart. No : she grieved for him as for the dead, and sincerely hoped no accident might ever throw them in each other's way again !

CHAPTER XV.

ST. OUVEN.

ST. OUVEN was not always to be the peaceful sanctuary which it had been to Miss Mills. She was there one evening in June rather later than usual, enjoying the sunset lights through the beautiful windows and the holy quiet of everything. She was not praying, but sitting quiet, thinking and finding rest and comfort in the solitude of the place; we may say solitude, for, although others were there, they were all engaged in some devotional exercise. At length her attention was attracted to a lady near her—she appeared thoroughly English, and it was evident she was only looking about her, and admiring the church. This was nothing singular, as any stranger passing through Rouen was sure to visit St. Ouen's as well as the Cathedral; but it seemed to Miss Mills that she had seen that lady's face before, yet she could in no way recall to her mind when or where. The lady turned and looked so earnestly at her that in a moment she felt guilty of having observed or indeed stared at her more than polite-

ness justifies. She immediately let down her veil and turned her head another way; in a few moments she saw the lady coming in that direction, so she rose and left the church. As she reached her own door she looked up the street and again saw the lady, who was only a few yards behind her: she quickly ran up to her own room, and almost as quickly repented of doing so. "How very stupid of me," said she, "it may be some English lady in difficulty in this strange place; and seeing I am English, she may have wished to speak to me, and I have thus lost an opportunity of being useful to a country-woman." She well remembered how grateful she had herself been, on first arriving in Paris, to an English lady in a shop who assisted her in purchasing an article before she was sufficiently master of the language or of her self-confidence to make herself intelligible. She looked out of her window, but no one was to be seen, and she felt quite vexed with herself.

It was nine o'clock, for she had been a longer time than usual at St. Ouen's and the summer evening light and air made her linger some minutes by her open window; it was too late for study, so she took up her book for an hour's reading, but she kept thinking of the English lady, and wondering who she was.

Next morning she went to Mme. Girard's at her

accustomed hour, and when they were chatting together at dinner she related her little incident of the previous evening.

Mme. Girard said she had no doubt but it was *the* English Lady as she was called; and wondered she had not seen her before, but she believed she did not reside in Rouen now, as she had formerly done, but in a village close by, which was much less expensive. She knew very little of her, but had always heard her spoken of as a person of very quiet habits, and shunning all society; indeed Mme. Girard thought that was much more likely the reason of her leaving Rouen. People said many strange things about her:—"but people will *invent* histories for their neighbours, if they cannot find out real ones," added Madame, and there the subject dropped.

At six o'clock Miss Mills was preparing to return home, but Mme. Girard pressed her to stay.

"My dear, you study too much: you forget that as you are teaching all day your brains require rest; you will get headaches, you do not look half so well as you did a month ago. Stay with us this evening; it has been such a hot day, we will go for a drive when the sun is down, and then take you home. I know it will do you good; you are pining for your dear England, and I shall be glad on your account when you go there for your holiday: I do not wonder at it; you have been away from all your friends nearly two

years ; it is too long, but next year I hope we shall all go to London together."

Miss Mills did not feel much disposed for the drive, yet could not gracefully decline the kind invitation, for she had no good reason to give for doing so.

She enjoyed it very much: They drove to the Church of Notre Dame de bon secours, which commands such a magnificent view of the surrounding wooded hills, sprinkled with such picturesque villages, and the lovely valleys intersected by the winding Seine.

They returned by a circuitous road so as to lengthen their drive, and as they entered the street in which Miss Mills resided *the English Lady* was leaving it in the opposite direction. Miss Mills saw her, and, pointing her out to Madame Girard, said:—

"There is the Lady I mentioned as having been at St. Ouen's last night!"—"Oh yes," she replied, "that is her; the poor people call her '*La bonne Anglaise*,' and regret she is not a Catholic, that she might be sure to go to heaven. I dare say she is come back to live in Rouen, by her being here two successive nights; she was sadly missed when she went away."

Miss Mills alighted at her own door, and having expressed her thanks for the pleasant evening, curtsied her adieu; she saw them drive off, and went up to her own room.

Again it was too late to study, so she amused herself at her piano, unwilling to shut out the twilight and cool breeze.

In about half an hour her Bonne knocked at the door, and on being admitted, told her that an English Lady had called, and had asked a great many questions about her; as to when she generally went out? and if she always staid so late? and was she never to be found at home? and the Bonne had told her that Miss Mills would most likely be at home to-morrow evening, as she scarcely ever stayed out two evenings in the same week; but that at any rate she would certainly be at home on Sunday, as she never went out then, excepting to church somewhere in the neighbourhood. The English Lady would not tell her name, but said she was so sorry she could not possibly call to-morrow, but would on Sunday. The Bonne being as communicative as most of her class, told her that Miss Mills was soon going back to England, she thought next week; and the Lady seemed very vexed about it, and asked if she were likely to return, but Bonne did not know.

Miss Mills was now quite mystified; she could give no more attention to her music, but sat thinking in the twilight until the soft moon had risen far into the blue vault above. But where was the use of thinking; after all there were so few English she knew; it could be none of the Eltons, as she had just heard from them. No doubt it was one of the

English from Mme. Rey's, and she now only wondered how she had been so stupid as not to think of that before. Whoever she was, probably she was with friends, visiting Rouen, en route for England, and the next day they would be sight-seeing, and that was how she could not call again before Sunday. It was all clear enough now; she hastily got into bed, half annoyed at having spent so much time in puzzling over it, and more than half disappointed that the little mystery which she had enjoyed at first, (for young people do enjoy mystery,) was dissolved.

The next day she told Madame Girard, who exclaimed that she was charmed; she hoped it was some dear English friend to cheer her up until she went to England. Miss Mills was grateful for the French lady's national and natural excitement about it, but did not think it could be; simply because there was no English lady, excepting Mrs. Elton, whom she should care to see, or to whom she would feel inclined to sacrifice her solitude for the next month. She was so thankful for that time, to school herself ere she was to go to Eversfield, where Reginald would not be, and where every word that was spoken about his marriage would be a sharper pang to her than she had at first anticipated.

The Sunday arrived; she went to church as usual, and on her return was told that the English lady was waiting in her room. She just asked if she had given her name, and on being told she had not, she

asked if she were young. The Bonne said, "Oh no, Madame was not at all young, *au contraire un peu agée*." The interest receded, and astonishment again advanced, for her Paris friends were young girls of her own age.

She ascended the stairs rather leisurely, thinking, wondering, at last persuading herself it was after all some mistake, and she was not the person sought by the visitor at all!

She entered the room deliberately, we should say, almost in a dignified manner for her. There sat the English lady she had seen at St. Ouen's and also the next evening in the street—this was stranger than ever; then she must have been to call upon her!

She rose as Miss Mills curtsied, and appeared very agitated.

Miss Mills begged her to take a seat nearer the open window, and then requested to be favoured with her name and the cause of her visit.

Judge of her surprise when the lady almost staggered towards her, threw her arms round her, and burst into tears, sobbing, "My child, my own Annie, I have got you at last!"

Poor Miss Mills was quite frightened; and not the less so, that she instantly recognized the voice of the Eversfield beggar!

She could not think fast enough. Was the woman mad? What could have brought her there? How could she have traced her to Rouen? Hundreds of

thoughts such as these crowded into her bewildered brain in a moment, but amidst all she could not utter a word.

She seemed to have some idea that something was the matter with the woman, and tried to release herself from her embrace, but it was too firm: she continued sobbing fearfully, and said, "No, no, I will never let you go again—there's nothing the matter;" then stood back, and looking at the poor girl, who trembled from head to foot, exclaimed: "Oh my child, how I am frightening you; but indeed I will be calm, and explain all; don't be afraid of me; there, there, now, I'll sit down quite quiet for a few minutes."

Miss Mills stammered; "You had better have some water;" and attempted to reach the carafe from the table where it stood.

"No, my child, I want nothing but you."

Miss Mills was now convinced she was in the power of some unfortunate maniac, and felt how unprotected she was. She knew not what to do; she knew opposition would not answer in such a case; but supposing she became violent, how save herself? the window was too high from the ground to think of jumping from it; the door was of little use, as the woman was between her and it, and the bell was behind the door: what could she do?

In a moment she decided on trying to get the woman nearer the other side of the room, so that

she should command the door and the bell ; assuming as much calmness as she could, she said :

“ If you will sit in this easy chair, you will be more comfortable ; and, if you have no objection, I will ring for the lunch, for I feel in want of something, and no doubt you will be glad of refreshment also : ”—she did not like to call her modest little dinner by any other name.

The woman seemed at first disposed to oppose her, but suddenly changed her tone, and said, “ Thank you, my dear, if it will not put you to any inconvenience, I should like something very much, and then we can talk.”

The bell was rung, and Miss Mills went into the next room, (which was her bedroom,) in the pretence of going to tell the servant what to bring ; but in truth it was to ask the Bonne to remain there for a little while. She took off her bonnet and mantle ; then knelt a few moments to ask protection and guidance in whatever might now be going to befall her.

She returned, and found the lady considerably composed ; and the lunch being on the table, she invited her to partake of it.

It was a singular meal ! neither of them feeling able to swallow a mouthful. The lady cying Miss Mills in a most peculiar, scrutinizing way ; her eyes frequently filling with tears ; and our little Governess very frightened, and just stealing glances now and then at her strange companion.

After about a quarter of an hour of this sort of make-believe performance, Miss Mills pressed her visitor to take something more, which she refused: she would not ring to have it removed, as she had decided that that should be the excuse for summoning the Bonne if she should require her assistance in any way.

She moved from the table towards the window, and stood looking out; she did not take a seat, as she wanted to be rid of her visitor.

She made some passing remark on the heat, and asked the lady if she resided in Rouen.

“No, only in the neighbourhood.”

“You are a stranger to me, Madam; may I now be permitted to ask the object of your calling on me?”

“Me,—a stranger to you! do you not remember me?”

“No; at least I think not: I never knew you. but I seem to have heard your voice before; that, however, was far away. I must beg you will tell me your name and business?”

“My name is Thorley, did you never hear that before?”

“No!”

“Never hear that name! How is it possible? What was your father’s name?”—And she appeared to gasp for breath, as the idea now came that after all she was wrong.

“My name is Mills, and I have neither father nor mother : I lost both before I was two years old.”

“Do you know for a certainty that they are both dead?”

“Really, Madam, you will excuse me, but unless you will at once tell me the reason of these questions, or the object of your visit, I must deem your conduct very strange, and decline answering them.”

“Oh answer me, answer me,” said the Lady, “I have abundant reason, my happiness, and perhaps yours, depends on my discovering who you are.”

Miss Mills became more and more alarmed as her visitor got excited.

“Madam, I have told you I am an orphan ; I lost my parents when I was, I may say, an infant, and have no relations that I know of.”

“Then how have you been educated and brought up?”

“Excuse me, Madam, as I said I shall answer no more questions, and unless you will at once give me a satisfactory reason for your visit, I beg it may terminate.”

“Miss Mills, I can tell you everything about yourself. Will you believe me if I first of all tell you, you were nursed for three years by a Mrs. Bradley at Wrington, in Somersetshire ; you were then removed to the care of a Mrs. Wilton in Shropshire, she died, and you went to board with a lady in London, and attended Queen’s College. thence you went

as Governess to Mrs. Elton, at Eversfield Rectory, where I saw you ; after that I confess I lost sight of you, until I met you last Thursday evening in St. Ouen's. Now is not all I have told you true ?”

“ Perfectly ; but I cannot imagine who you are, or where you procured your information, or——-indeed, why you should trouble or interest yourself about me at all !”

“ Will you then now believe what I can tell you of your own history before the period I have named ?”

“ I really cannot promise, and yet I do not know why I should not ; if it were untrue I cannot contradict you, for, as I said, I know nothing of my antecedents.”

“ Then take a seat near me, and allow me to unfasten my bonnet and shawl for a while. I only ask you to believe me, and I can give proofs, fearful proofs of the truth of all I shall state. You must think me strange, perhaps mad ; but thank God I am not so, and I will be as brief as you shall wish.”

Miss Mills rang for the lunch to be removed, in other words to liberate the Bonne.

CHAPTER XVI.

MY MOTHER.

“IN the first place I must tell you that your name is not Mills. You stare at my first assertion, but I have more wonderful ones to make. Your name is Annie —. But I will not tell it you yet.—Your father and mother were a most unhappy couple, and quarrelled incessantly. He married her for her money, but she loved, and does love him deeply.”

“*Does* love him,” said Miss Mills, “then do you pretend to tell me my parents are still living?”

“Your mother is, and there is at present every reason to believe that your father is also.”

“I can scarcely believe that—but proceed, I will hear all you have to say.”

“I told you I could bring proofs of all I tell you. Your mother had between thirty and forty thousand pounds, which sum was to come to her at her father’s death; but when that took place, it was found that he had been shamefully cheated by the lawyer, to whom he had entrusted everything. He had made off with twenty-five thousand: the Bank, in consequence of the sudden demand for that sum, added to

previous difficulties, stopped payment ; it afterwards partially recovered its liabilities, so far as to be able to pay five thousand more, which your mother got. In the meantime the only link which united your father to your mother was severed : her fortune was gone ; for her he had never cared ! It was evident they would not live together much longer. Their quarrels were worse, and a feeling of perfect hatred grew up on his side. In one of those passions, which caused all your mother's misery, he threatened (as he had often done) to leave her ; she retaliated, and said that at any rate he could not take the child,—higher words followed, and it ended in her daring him to do it. He left her for a week, then came back, sent her out of the way for a few hours, took the child and deserted his wife.

“I cannot now tell you more particulars of that dreadful time of agony : when she came home and found her husband and child gone for ever. It is a misery that would shake the firmest mind——”

The visitor here paused for a few seconds ; Miss Mills did not speak : and at last she said, in a voice almost amounting to the supernatural in its sepulchral hoarseness, “Annie Mills, that utterly miserable woman is now before you, that child is yourself ! He, my husband, put you out to nurse, as I have told you, to a Mrs. Bradley, but under the name you now bear ; it was his mother's maiden name. He was Captain Henry Thorley, and I was Maria Bennett

whom he married for my money. You are our child, my own long-lost child !”

Miss Mills was mute with astonishment ; she could not believe nor yet disbelieve. She felt as if she was in a dream, and only had to rouse herself in order to dispel the vision ; but reality came.

Her mother rose and took her hands in hers, and looked at her with an imploring gaze.

“ My child, my own Annie, believe me, it is all true ! See here,” (and she took the articles out of her bag), “ here is our marriage certificate, and here is a lock of your hair--and here is a likeness of your father—”

Miss Mills looked at them each, but still they seemed to bring no proof to her mind.

How should she know whose likeness or hair it was ? She sighed, and said in a low voice : “ You must tell me more ; I cannot make it out yet. Where have you been all these years that you have not found me before, and how is it possible you have traced me out at last ?”

Now it devolved on poor Mrs. Thorley to relate all her past life of marriage and separation ; of trial, suffering, and crime ; with all of which, up to the time of her leaving Moseley Hall, our readers are acquainted, so we will not weary them by a repetition. Throughout she cast no shadow of blame on her husband, it was all her own fault ; she had not studied his character, nor curbed her own imperious

will and temper, nor even tried the effect of submission, until, after repeated threats, he put them into execution.

She related how she had taught singing, and how the five thousand pounds came in, so that she had never touched the two hundred per annum, which was still accumulating in the Bank.

"Still," persisted Miss Mills, "I cannot imagine how you first discovered me, or where you have been since you left Moseley."

"Listen, and I will tell you all, my child. You were not two years old when your father deserted me and took you. I have the date of your birth written in my Bible at home, and will bring it and show it to you: at any rate you must allow I cannot have obtained that knowledge from any other source. It is written in the Bible which your father gave me when we were married, and he wrote my name in it as being my husband's first gift. Oh those were happy days," — and poor Mrs. Thorley was quite overcome for a few minutes. She continued: "You are not yet twenty, and *very* like your father. After he left me I felt sure it was perfectly useless to seek or inquire for you; his plan was laid and carried out so as to baffle all attempts at that. I have his cruel letter (which I will show you, perhaps, some day); it told me all he had done, and left not the slightest ray of hope. I knew it would not do to remain in the same neighbourhood any longer, where the ser-

vant, policeman, and perhaps doctor would talk about the event, (which I will explain more fully another time,) each building up their own history of it; so I left the next week without giving any one the slightest clue to my whereabouts. I went into a quiet, comfortable lodging in the neighbourhood of Paddington, and soon procured a few good pupils. You will wonder how, as I knew no one, and consequently had no introduction; I had a fine voice, and sang well at that time, so I sang at a few public concerts, and gained a little celebrity. As the London season drew to a close I lost all my pupils, and the succeeding months absorbed all my little savings. I thought then it would be less risk and anxiety if I were to get a situation as Governess in a gentleman's family: I soon met with that of Moseley Hall, where all took place of which I have already told you. Whilst there I got a letter by some round-about way, (for you know I called myself Miss Bennett,) informing me that Deane had been able to settle their affairs in such a manner as to repay half of the five thousand, and asking into what Bank should it be paid. I selected by chance, (or I should rather say Providence guided me, as it has ultimately restored you to me,) the London and Westminster, for I considered it better not to have it payable at the same as the two hundred annuity. Ere I accomplished my awful project at Moseley I wrote to them to pay in fifty pounds to the Colonial on account of Maria

Thorley, so that you see when Sir George Strathstone should apply there for the money I had named in my letter to him, there would be plenty to meet his demand without touching the other. My dressing-case which I had sent to their care I have since claimed and had restored, but they had heard nothing of my husband. You see I am answering your last question first, as to where I have been all this time. I must now tell you that after I had failed in the suicide I attempted at Moseley I was taken away a lunatic! My child, you shudder! and well you may. Had I died that fearful Christmas night you would never have known that you have to blush for the crimes of your mother: but oh, forgive me! I feel that the merciful God above has done so; my child, be not more hard in your judgment. Join with me in the hope that my sins have met with punishment sufficiently severe to entitle me to leniency from my fellow-mortals."

Miss Mills could not speak. Even were this not her mother, what a melancholy history of sorrow and suffering was that which she had recounted. She covered her face with her handkerchief to hide the tears which were flowing rapidly. She knew not what to say. It was impossible for the child to pass sentence on the parent, and yet such it would be if all were true.

Mrs. Thorley waited a minute in speechless agony and suspense. Then she threw herself on her knees

before the poor girl, and in a voice of entreaty, but stifled with sobs, she said: "My child! my Annie! speak!—Oh, one word of pardon or pity!—Do but look on me!—Never was a more wretched suppliant."

Miss Mills looked at her, and tried to raise her. "Oh don't, don't kneel to me! Whoever you may be, kneel to God, and to Him only. Pity! oh yes, I do pity you from the very depths of my heart; but pray go on." She tried again and again to raise the kneeling woman, but she sobbed more than ever, and seemed to crouch lower and lower, as though every instant of the delayed pardon added loads to her guilt and misery.

Miss Mills tried to be firm; she said: "Indeed, I insist on your getting up, or I must leave you; I cannot, will not, submit to this."

Mrs. Thorley, in a manner, crawled up to her seat, but did not utter a word. Miss Mills said: "Pray, go on, I am waiting for the rest of your answer to my questions; I must know all before I can decide anything; but," with a deep sigh, "oh dear, this is very dreadful:"—and she again covered her face with her hands. Mrs. Thorley resumed in a subdued broken-hearted voice:—

"Then I must wait, wait again for peace! Oh God, will it *never* come?"

"Undoubtedly," softly whispered Miss Mills.

"Bless you, bless you, my child, for one word of

consolation and hope. I will be patient and proceed. I was not long in the asylum, in fact, in a few months I was pronounced perfectly well, but I did not care to leave at first. All the past came back to my mind, so loaded with crime and horror that I dreaded to go forth into the world; I felt in a sort of seclusion there; but as health returned, and my nerves gathered strength, I began to feel miserable, surrounded by such afflicted associates, and indeed feared that in time it might occasion a relapse in myself. I had plenty of money, so I left and went to London. I had nowhere else to go, no friends or relatives, and even if I had had them, I think shame would have deterred me from seeking them; besides, I had a sort of lingering hope that I might some day see my husband there, or hear of you; at any rate it seemed the most likely place. After living about in different parts for many years, again I am certain that it was no mere chance which directed me to a neat lodging house in Dorchester Place, kept by a very respectable looking woman, who told me she had only been there six months, having lived all her life in the country. I had no friends or acquaintance in London, so was often grateful to my kind landlady for coming to chat with me a little in the dull winter evenings. She told me all her past history, and a great deal about the neighbourhood where she used to live. I knew she was a widow, and as the likeness of a little girl hung over the chimney-piece in my room, I

naturally supposed it was of a child of hers. I had often and often looked at it and fancied I could trace a resemblance to you in it, but it was such a miserable daub that it would have been just as like any other blue-eyed, light-haired child. One evening I asked her if she had any children? she said no, not living, she had lost the only one she had had.

“Is that her likeness?” said I.

“Oh no, that is the sweetest little pet that ever lived, but it is not very well painted, it was done by a young man in our village.”

“Ah!” said the good woman, shaking her head as she looked up at the picture, “I fear there must have been some queer doings there, but the poor little dear was a mere baby when she was brought to me, so could not tell me anything; she used to prattle about her Papa and her dear Mamma, and told me that she didn’t much love her Pa because he scolded her dear Ma and made her cry, and that they lived in London.”

I cannot describe to you the feelings that overpowered me, my head seemed to reel round, and my heart beat as if bursting. I said, “Oh tell me, tell me how she came to you.”

She then related how a fine handsome gentleman came one day and asked if she would take charge of a little girl for two or three years, she was an orphan, and he was her guardian, but obliged to go abroad, and he wished her to have pure country air and plenty of good food and kindness.

“ I undertook it, and he was to pay me twenty-five pounds a year, and I was to find her clothes and everything : it was much more than I expected. He brought her in a few days, and plenty of nice clothes and toys. He said something about the things being marked wrong, but I could not make out why, and it didn't signify to me. They were all marked A. T. ; but he said that her name was Mills, for it was an unfortunate affair altogether ; the father and mother had been separated ere they died. I could not follow what he said, but I just said, I hope, Sir, it is all right, and that you will not be bringing a poor woman into trouble. He said, ‘ Not a bit, don't you fear, you will have your money sent you regularly for three years, and then the child will be removed.’ He was going away, and the poor little thing clung about him, and called him Papa, and begged him to take her back to her dear Ma. I thought it looked very bad, and I said, ‘ I thought you said her father and mother were both dead ?’ He said, ‘ So they are, and have been ever since she was three months old, but she always calls me and my wife, Papa and Mamma ; it is all right enough.’

He went away, and I thought the little pet's heart would break, but after a while I got her out into my bit of a garden and gave her some flowers, and then took her in to tea ; she asked if Papa would come to-night, but I said No, not to-night, you will go to bed like a little darling, and then we will see if he will

come to-morrow. She said, ‘But, I want my own dear Ma so badly ;’ and she at last cried herself to sleep.”

I asked my landlady what the gentleman was like, and she described my husband exactly : I asked if she knew his name : she said the little girl used to say her name was not Mills, it was Maria Thor-ey, for she could not speak very plain.

The good woman was not a little amazed at my bursting into tears, and exclaiming, “Oh tell me all about them ! it was my husband and child ; where is she ?”

She could hardly believe me at first, until I showed her things with my name in them, and your birth as recorded in the Bible I tell you of ; then her kind-heartedness indeed showed itself. She told me all she could, but oh, it was so little :—viz. “That at the end of the three years, a carriage came with a lady in it, and after making several inquiries to convince her that it was the right place, she gave me a letter containing the order for me to pack up her little wardrobe, and give her up to the lady, who was henceforth to have the charge of her, and that if I had spent any thing beyond what was agreed upon, she was to repay me, and if she found I had behaved well to the child, she was to make me a present of five pounds. She said she wanted no further proof of my claim to that, as the dear child clung to me, and would not hear of leaving her dear old granny, as she called me, and showed such proofs of her love, as convinced her

that I had been kind to her ; and indeed no one could be otherwise, she was the very nicest little darling I ever saw, and I couldn't bear to lose her, it was like losing my own again."

" But," said I, " cannot you tell me where she went ?"

" Well, the lady's name was Wilton, but if it hadn't been for the coachman going to the public just opposite and gossiping, I shouldn't have known that she lived at Oswestry."

You may guess how I used to talk about you with good Mrs. Bradley after that evening, and she promised the greatest secrecy about it all ; for, as I told her, if she named it to any one, it might prevent my finding you. I wrote immediately to Mrs. Wilton, but in a month my letter came back from the dead letter office : I then despaired of finding you, but I wrote to the clergyman, he wrote back that he could tell me nothing of it, but as a Mrs. Wilton with a little girl used to live at Whittington, about two miles off, he had forwarded my letter to the clergyman there. I soon had a letter from Mr. Lloyd ; it was written in the kindest manner, and showed he was a sincere Christian. He told me that he perfectly remembered it all, but that Mrs. Wilton had died when the child was about twelve years old, and that the child had gone to London ; but he held out some hopes of procuring me more information. That never came, and I had given up all idea of ever

hearing anything more of you; of my husband I could learn nothing. But just when I was in the deepest despair, I happened to go into the Bank one day to draw some money. I had to wait a few minutes, so took up a paper, but my attention was soon arrested by a conversation between one of the principals and a clerk. The former said, Dawson, have you made up Miss Mills' book.

“ ‘ Don't know anything of it, Sir.’ ”

“ ‘ Oh, I forgot, you have not been here long; look up a book belonging to Miss Annie Mills; she used to be at a Mrs. Wilton's, near Oswestry, but I am not sure of her present address.’ ”

“ It is impossible to tell you how my heart bounded; I felt choking, but listened, (as you may guess,) sharply enough. It seemed the book was soon found, and a conversation ensued as to the dates in it, and it was settled that she had not drawn her money for the past two half years, and that the book was made up all right. Another clerk came to attend to me, but I immediately said: ‘ Before you give me my money will you be so obliging as to ask the gentleman for Miss Mills' present address.’ They immediately gave it me, from the book, at Eversfield Rectory. ‘ But,’ said he, ‘ if you are a friend of hers, probably you know that she is the Governess there, so of course may not be at liberty to see people whenever she pleases.’ I bowed and thanked them, saying I wanted to write. I then went home and

told Mrs. Bradley all that had occurred ; she said she was quite certain it could not be you, as you could not be old enough to go out as Governess yet, and the gentleman had also told her you were very well off ; the more I thought of this, I must confess the truer it appeared. However, I determined to try, and, as you know, went there in the disguise of a poor woman ; I thought I should then have easier access to people who could tell me any gossip about you, which as a lady I could not have procured. I lodged at a village about five miles from Eversfield for a week, and saw you walking out with some children ; then I returned to town to make more inquiry, in fact I determined to go down to Oswestry about it and hear all I could there, and also to call on the Banker again, but I gathered little information. I went to Eversfield the second time, and saw you again with the children, and then I crept up to the house and saw you, as you know, sitting at dinner. I no longer doubted that I had discovered my lost treasure. I hastened back to London, intending to cast off my disguise, and to return to Eversfield to see you and declare who I was, but the recent agitation and excessive joy were, I suppose, too much for me : I was taken ill with a severe attack of nervous fever, which threatened my life, and prevented me for some time from carrying out my project. After nearly three months I was again able to go to the Bank, and the first news I heard of you

was, that you had left Eversfield. You had drawn the remainder of your money, consequently the Banker could furnish me with no clue whereby to trace you, but he had heard that you were gone to France or Germany to study. I think my despair was now deeper than ever—everything seemed to concur in preventing my discovering you.”

She paused a few moments, and then added: “I will tell you no more to-night ; I have already excited you too much ; I will leave you and return to-morrow evening, bringing with me proofs which must remove any doubt which may yet linger in your mind. Good night, my child, try to sleep and dream of the happy future, which I hope may yet shine upon us.”

CHAPTER XVII.

ARE YOU SURE?

THE strange visitor gone, Annie retired early to the seclusion of her bed-chamber, but no sleep visited her eyelids that night. Thoughts, more bewildering and more wonderful than any that had yet racked her brain, kept her wide awake. At one time she felt a sort of comfort, hitherto unknown to her, in the feeling that henceforth she need not be alone in the world; the next moment doubts as to the truth of the strange story chased all such peaceful visions from her mind. She tossed and turned about all night with a feverish restlessness, longing for day to return, that she might be convinced that such events had really occurred, and that she was not in a troubled dream all the time.

Her mind was so absent during the morning that Madame Girard several times joked her about it, saying she was sure that there was some one in England of whom she was thinking, besides the friends to whom she was going. At length Annie found it useless to attempt any further appearance of presence of mind, so told Madame Girard that she

had heard some news which had greatly upset her, and with which she would acquaint her soon, and begged to be allowed to return home a little earlier than usual.

On reaching her room she sat with her head resting on her arm, endeavouring to collect her thoughts; it was a vain effort, and at the expiration of nearly two hours her visitor arrived, and found her still absorbed in harassing meditation.

Even then Annie scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry to see her. The fear possessed her that it might all prove a grand mistake; this feeling convinced her how much she had allowed hope to preponderate.

After they had taken tea and talked a little on indifferent subjects, each under the influence either of an assumed wish to appear at her ease, or of a dread to recommence their extraordinary revelations.

Her mother began by saying: "I am come, as I promised, fully furnished with my proofs." She reached a little bag from a chair on which she had laid it, with her bonnet and shawl, when she came in, opened it, and took out first the Bible, in which were recorded her own marriage and Annie's birth; after the latter was written, "My precious lost child! shall I ever see her again?" Then she drew out a small paper parcel, but her trembling fingers almost refused to unfasten the string. This parcel con-

tained a locket, on one side of which was a likeness of a gentleman, and on the other a lock of his hair artistically arranged, and encircling it, in gold letters on blue enamel, was his name and the date of his marriage, as already entered in the Bible : in another paper was a little blue kid shoe with a silver buckle, evidently having been worn by a child under two years of age. "This," said she, "was my child's shoe ; it was left behind by some accident or oversight when he took her away."

Annie screamed when she saw these, and rushed to her own room, returning in a few moments with a little box in her hand. Here were most convincing proofs, for she had the fellow buckle, and an exactly similar locket. Old Mrs. Bradley had taken great care of them ; for (feeling sure as she did that there was some tragical history attached to her little charge), she thought these articles would be proofs of her identity, any day that such may be required : so she had done them up in the little box, and written on it what they were, and the date of Annie's first coming to her.

No shadow of doubt could longer exist. She related all her past life to her mother ; everything but one secret, and *that* she could not divulge even to her mother—at present she was almost a stranger to her.

She then said, "Well, but now, tell me what made you come here as a likely place to discover my father?"

Mrs. Thorley replied: "It was through one of those extraordinary events of my life that I have been led to do so. As I told you, I recovered my dressing-case, which, when I left Moseley, was sent to the Bank. I had written on it that if Captain Thorley did not claim it within ten years the gentleman to whom I had directed it was to open it: but before the expiration of that time I had left the asylum, and claimed it myself. I then asked if any more notes had been sent for me; there had only been one, and Mr. Smith said he had not received any for three or four years, so that I had no tidings at all of you. He, of course, was aware that Henry and I were separated, but whether he knew anything of my subsequent life I could not find out. I inquired if he could give me any idea of what part of the world Captain Thorley was in. He said not with any certainty, for he had never had any communication with him; the notes which used to be sent to him concerning you only bore a London post mark; 'But,' added he, 'I could tell you one thing, if I thought I should not be raising false hopes: and you must bear in mind that what I have to relate occurred more than two years ago.'

"I begged him to risk that; *any* thing if I could but find some trace of him. He then told me that a friend of his had occasion to go to Rouen on business, and stayed at the Hôtel Albion; it is kept by an Englishman named Smith, who had married a

Frenchwoman, and between them it is well known that they keep the most comfortable, economical hotel and table d'hôte possible. He was there about a fortnight; there were generally as many French as English at the table. One day a gentleman came in, whom his friend was certain he had met several times in society. The addition of a luxuriant beard and moustache had not changed his appearance beyond recognition, and when he spoke he likewise recognized his voice. Moreover, he also felt sure that the gentleman remembered him, for he coloured slightly, and did not look at all at his ease. He wanted to change his place at table, as he said he did not like the draught from the door, but the table was full. Mr. Smith's friend could not at the moment remember his name; but his manœuvre was evidently to get on the same side of the table with himself, so that they should no longer face each other. In a moment his name flashed into Mr. Emmerson's mind, and he addressed him at once as Captain Thorley, offering to change places with him. The Captain bowed and thanked him for his politeness, but said he was mistaken if he thought he was offering civility to an acquaintance, as his name was Schroeder. Emmerson looked amazed, but at a public table he could say no more than apologise, adding that it was the most peculiar likeness imaginable, and that if he were looking at himself in a glass he could not more nearly resemble Captain Thorley.

Dinner ended, Mr. Schroeder left the room, and Mr. Emmerson asked Madame Smith who he was. She said she knew nothing of him, but that he came backwards and forwards a great deal from Algeria to Rouen: she thought he had some Government appointment connected with the cotton trade; he generally staid about a week, and came two or three times a year.

“The next day at dinner he did not appear. Mrs. Smith and others were greatly surprised; he had slept there as usual, and went out very early. She inquired of the waiters if they knew anything of him, and then went up to his room to see if he had taken his portmanteau. That was gone, and a note lay on the table containing the payment for his short visit, and announcing that unexpected business had called him away for a few days, but he should probably be back in ten days or a fortnight.

“Whether he ever returned Mr. Smith could not tell, as Mr. Emmerson came home, but more convinced than ever that he had spoken to my husband.

“At his suggestion I wrote a line to Mrs. Smith in a feigned hand and name, merely inquiring if Mr. Schroeder still frequented her hotel. I received an answer in the affirmative, adding that he was there then, but leaving next morning, and that such being the case she had told him I had been inquiring for him, but he said it must be a mistake, for he had never heard the name I had assumed. I had no tie

to London, so decided that Rouen or its immediate neighbourhood should at once become my residence, at any rate, for a time. In about a month I went to the Hôtel Albion, as Mrs. Smith could not suppose it was I who had written the note. I remained there four or five months. One day I heard some one at table ask when Schroeder was expected—Mrs. Smith said she could not tell; he ought to be there now, and that it was rather strange that several people had been inquiring about him lately; and that some time ago a gentleman had apparently recognised him as some English friend, which seemed to annoy him, for he left the hotel suddenly the next morning; and he only staid three days the last time he was there. Since that she had had a note from a Mrs. Wilmington inquiring about him, but he said he never knew any one of the name.

“I thought it was very possible he might have heard by some accident that a Mrs. Thorley was there, and although he could not suspect it is I, he might fancy it was some connection who might recognize him; so I left, and went to lodge at the village where I now am. Ere leaving kind Mrs. Smith, I made her my friend; and she has promised to let me know the next time he comes, and to send a carriage for me to come and join the dining table. I sometimes do so now, so that it may not appear singular that I should do so then. I have shown her that likeness, and she says it certainly is the

same person, but I have not betrayed to her who he is : she believes he is a cousin of mine, who has some business to arrange for me, and she has promised me faithfully that she will never give him the slightest hint of any one coming who knows him, nor in fact mention my name before him."

The mother and daughter then talked over their plans ; Annie was to go to Eversfield in less than a fortnight, and as Mrs. Thorley could not well leave her present abode immediately, it was settled that they should remain as they were until Annie's return. She was engaged to Madame Girard until the end of October ; and had recently been persuading her to postpone her visit to London until the spring, as the dark short days would be very dismal in a strange place. Madame Girard had acquiesced in the plan, on condition that Miss Mills would promise to remain with her another year ; so that she felt almost engaged to her for that time. As she was going so very soon, she quite agreed with her mother that nothing should be said of their newly discovered relationship until after her return, for fear such a marvellous story should get talked about, and reach Mr. Schroeder's ears at the boarding table. Madame Girard of course joked her about her secret, and she promised she should hear all when she came back from England.

"Then you are sure you *will* come back?" said the lady ; "the gentleman is not there waiting for you?"

Annie laughed and assured her not ; and that unless illness or any unforeseen accident should occur to prevent her, she should surely be back early in August.

“And then you will stay with me for another year, will you not?”

“That I cannot as positively promise, but be assured, Madame, you shall know decidedly when we meet again.”

They parted ; Madame Girard saying, “*qu’elles aiment les mystères ces Anglaises !*”—Little did she think she should never see Miss Mills again, and yet that her Governess would return to her unmarried ; that would have been a problem to puzzle her !

Mrs. Thorley had come to stay in Rouen for the last few days, ere her daughter left. As the time drew near, she seemed quite to dread the parting, fearing she might not return, and that so her newly found treasure might again elude her grasp. Annie was in a very uncertain state of feeling ; at times delighted at the prospect of a holiday at Eversfield, and of passing a month with Mrs. Elton as her visitor ; also the succeeding return to Rouen had lost its gloom, as she should now have her mother to welcome her back ; at other times very low and unhappy at the consciousness that Reginald’s marriage was such a cloud in her sky of happiness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE IS NO "CHANCE."

JULY 6th was a day exactly in accordance with Annie Thorley's feelings. It was showery, with intervening bright gleams of sunshine ; and in the afternoon there was a short and rather sharp thunderstorm ; but when she landed at Southampton, it had settled into a most lovely bright evening. It was all arranged ere she left Rouen, that as she must sleep one night on the way, she should go at once to London, and be Mrs. Bradley's visitor. Mrs. Thorley had previously written to inform her late landlady of her joyful discovery, so that the welcome of her early friend was awaiting Annie ; she had promised to remain two nights, so as to have one clear day for reciting all her adventures, and filling in the mere sketch of her former life, given in her mother's letter. She even had the locket and buckle to show as proofs of her identity, if required, but as we may guess such was not necessary.

She continued her journey to Eversfield on the 8th, and on reaching there received the kindest welcome possible from Mrs. Elton and all the family.

She now began to feel she was no longer a friendless orphan, and that the solitary part of her life was passed; and her heart rose in gratitude to the merciful Father who gives friends to advise, comfort and cheer us in our pilgrimage. Every blessing that came, she traced back to His hand, and therefore felt it doubly valuable; it was a proof of the love and care of the Friend who could never fail her.

She found her *ci-devant* pupils comparatively grown up: in fact Edith was so, and a remarkably nice, lady-like looking girl; she had not a trace of beauty in the general acceptation of the word, but, like her mother, possessed a very sweet, winning expression of countenance and manner.

Mrs. Elton accompanied Annie to her room, but would not stay many minutes; the first dinner bell had rung, and she had so much to tell her which she knew would surprise her greatly, that she would not begin histories until to-morrow; as she was leaving the room, she stepped back and said:

"I will just tell you we have an addition to our table: Mr. Elton has a curate; in fact, he had calculated on Reginald to fill the office, so, as soon as *he* changed his intentions, he advertized for one; he has been with us some months, and we are all very pleased with him, as no doubt you will soon discover; his name is Edward Wilton; no relation I suppose of your old friend?"

Annie replied she should think not; Mrs. Wilton

had a nephew in the church, but as it was a common name, it was not likely to be him.

She was soon prepared for dinner with her usual neatness, and went down to the drawing-room. Mrs. Elton was there alone, it was fortunate she was so ; for it appeared as if the return to the locality was already going to produce the old fainting attacks. It did not however amount to that ; Annie only sat down very abruptly on the nearest chair, looked very pale, and seemed almost choking with some emotion. Mrs. Elton saw it, and said, " You are overdone with your long journey ; lie on the sofa while I fetch you a glass of wine."

The cause of the agitation this time was a full-length, life-like portrait of Reginald, as she had known him, sitting in an easy posture at a table, writing, and just looking up as though he heard some one come into the room : it faced her as she opened the door, in such a manner, that it really looked like the veritable, living, Reginald ; she would not have been surprised to see the figure rise from the canvass and come forward to speak to her. It was a very recent addition to the ornaments of the room, so she was not prepared for such an early attack on her courage.

When Mrs. Elton returned she had quite regained her equanimity, and on being asked her opinion of it, expressed herself quite calmly.

The dinner bell rang, and they proceeded to the dining room together.

The usual form of introduction took place between the strangers, and they sat opposite each other, on either side of Mrs. Elton. During dinner it was rather difficult sometimes to keep up any conversation between them; for both were reserved characters. When there had been an unusually long pause, Mrs. Elton asked the curate whether he and Miss Mills, (for we must remember that as yet she was known by no other name at Eversfield,) could not claim acquaintanceship, as an old lady of his name had been her earliest friend? He smiled, and said he really did not know, he should be most happy if it were so; where had she known his namesake? Miss Mills replied that it was now several years since her dear old friend had died, and that she was living in Shropshire all the time she had known her; that she had very few relatives; a son abroad, and a nephew who was a clergyman, were all she had ever heard named. Mr. Wilton responded that he did not possess many relatives; in fact only one that he knew of, and that was a cousin who was a clergyman! Whereupon Mrs. Elton said she did not think they should be able to establish any relationship between them, unless he could prove himself to be his own cousin; they all three laughed at this, but he remarked, "Why should I not be the cousin's cousin, that is the old lady's son?"

"Oh no," quickly said Miss Mills, "that is not at all likely."

"Why not, may I ask? Do you know the son in question?"

"No, I never saw him, but I am afraid he was a most unlikely character ever to make a clergyman; at least I should be very sorry if he were one; so I advise you to be contented to be yourself."

Silence again ensued for some little time.

Dinner over, they strolled into the garden and shrubberies in little parties, chatting together.

Mr. Elton joined his wife and Miss Mills, and once referred to the beggar woman, assuring her she was not in the neighbourhood, and if she came again he positively would ferret her out. To their amazement Miss Mills only laughed, and said, "Oh, I am not afraid of her now." To which Mr. Elton replied, "No, it was only nervousness when you were, but it was nevertheless unaccountable; I think you must have been frightened about beggars or gipsies when you were a child, and such fears generally grow up with us, without our being able to trace out the cause: it is a most wicked, unpardonable thing to frighten a child; they are naturally such fearless little creatures."

"Oh no," said she, "that has nothing to do with it; but Mrs. Elton says we are to have no histories to-night. She promises that she has a great deal to tell me, and I have plenty in return for her, but we must keep our revelations until to-morrow, according to agreement."

"Then," said Mr. Elton, "I am sure it *must* be that you know something about that woman."

Annie again laughed, but said no more.

"You little mystery," said Mrs. Elton; "well, let us go in to tea."

The evening passed in the most cheerful way, there was plenty of music. Mr. Wilton sang tolerably, and had a pleasant voice, and joined Edith in several duets. Mrs. Elton proved that her voice was still at her command, and her husband's face shewed that it had not ceased to be musical to his ear.

The next morning, after breakfast, most of the party went about their various avocations and amusements; it was intensely hot, so no walking could be thought of. Mrs. Elton therefore proposed that she and Miss Mills should take their work to the summer-house in the shady walk. Mr. Elton mischievously asked what book he should get her, as he was going into the library.

Mrs. Elton said, "You see, my dear, he loves to quiz as much as ever," and off they went.

As soon as they were comfortably settled in the arbour, with a plate of freshly gathered strawberries before them, Mrs. Elton said:

"Now, who shall tell the first secret? for I am sure you have some, and I am longing to know them."

Annie felt somewhat disinclined to be the first listener; she felt that Reginald's name would be necessarily much introduced; and yet she had always

thought the best way is to get the worst over first ; also what she had to relate was such a long story : so she replied :

" Oh, you know there is every possible reason for you to be first, according to all the rights of marriage and seniority and position, and—in fact, everything ; and I can only feel very proud that you are so kind as to take me into your confidence, or to interest yourself about my affairs, so please to begin."

" *Vous faites des phrases*, my dear, as your friends on the other side of the Channel would say. However, to begin, what do you think of our curate ?"

" Well, I have seen so very little of him, that really I have had no time to form an opinion."

" True," said Mrs. Elton, " and then you were always rather cautious in giving your opinion, so it is not very likely that I shall get at it in this instance. But, perhaps you will be surprised when I tell you, that we have special reasons for wishing to find out his character as much as possible. We greatly hoped that he might have proved a relative of your old friend, but it is evident he is not."

" No, he denied it, and it is such a common name ? but pray tell me your reason, as it must be something beyond his continuing curate. It cannot be—oh, no ! how foolish of me, she is yet too young."

" But *it is*—you have guessed it," rejoined Mrs. Elton. " It is true she *is* very young ; dear Edith !

she will only be eighteen next November ; but there is no likelihood of its taking place yet, and we are desirous not to have it considered an engagement, until we shall have taken every means in our power to find out something about him, and to study his character. It is very awkward when young men have no relations nor friends."

"Is he liked here?" asked Annie.

"Oh most decidedly ! quite admired in the pulpit, and beloved in the parish. He is very active and energetic among the sick and poor, and seems in every way to act up to the pure gospel truth he preaches. He has not been in orders so long as one would expect from his age, but he has travelled a great deal, and I should say has had great opportunities of seeing and studying the bad and good side of human nature, and they have not been thrown away upon him. Everything he says in his sermons impresses us with the feeling, that he speaks from his own experience of the human heart. But you will judge for yourself, and you will also hear him speak at our missionary meeting next week. He is very reserved about himself: we learn nothing of his early life, unless we ask a direct question. He has been in Africa, America, Victoria, and New Zealand. It is possible he may have known your old friend's son, for he says there were three Wiltons from England, within a short distance of each other, where he was staying in the Canterbury Settlement.

I wish he had been your friend's nephew, as then we should have had no doubts."

Annie said she had never seen either the son or nephew that she was aware of. She then asked in as indifferent a voice as she could command, whether she had ever seen Mrs. Reginald Elton.

"Oh, I should think you must. She has so often been here. It is his cousin Florence, a pale, very delicate looking girl. She is not robust now, she grew so very fast, and is very young, scarcely eighteen. I should have preferred for both of them, that the marriage should have been postponed for two or three years, but young people don't listen to old Mammās on such occasions! They are well suited to each other, and I trust will be very happy, but I think it was the cause of his giving up the church, and we much regret that. An idle life is bad for any man. She has money now, and at the death of an uncle, will inherit something considerable."

Annie said she had never seen her; she remembered having heard her frequently spoken of, as having passed the holidays there, and the year they were at Scarborough together last time, (yes, thought she, *together* for the *last* time,) the children said cousin Florence was to be at Eversfield by the time they were back.

They then talked about the other children and the governess, and a silence ensued for a few minutes.

Mrs. Elton said, "Now for your history."

Annie said, "You are quite right in thinking I have one; it is a very long one, and connected throughout with my *friend* the *beggar*, as we used to call her." She then, to Mrs. Elton's infinite astonishment, related her account of her meeting with her mother! Much, of course, she refrained from exposing. The child could not divulge all, but as much as she did, deeply interested her hearer.

"It is incredible," said she at last, "then you are absolutely not Miss Mills at all?"

"No, I am Annie Thorley, daughter of the beggar woman," and she laughed heartily.

Mrs. Elton saw her husband walking down the garden; she called to him, and as he approached, she went out of the arbour, so as to stand before Annie, as she said:

"Walter, I have a lady to introduce to you!"

"Well, my love, how can I pay my respects if you stand before her and envelope her with the shadow of your crinoline."

"Now, Walter, nonsense, you know I never wear one."

"No, you have too much sense, or rather, you know I should forbid such a nuisance; but let me see the lady; you are at some of your tricks I see by your countenance, so I *will* not be surprised at anything; but I did not know you had any one but Miss Mills with you."

"Oh, then you are quite mistaken, she has not been with me at all. In fact, I do not know such a person."

Mr. Elton now looked extraordinarily surprised. "Why, my dear love, what can you mean? what are you talking about?"

Mrs. Elton moved on one side, and showed Annie blushing and laughing immoderately.

"That young lady's name is Thorley!"

"You don't mean that! Well, I never knew anything done more shilly. But, indeed, Mrs. Thorley, you should not have been so very close with your French tricks; and we should have been most happy to have welcomed Mr. Thorley; it is early days to be separated."

At this both ladies laughed more than ever: Mrs. Elton exclaiming, "That is not it, she is not married."

"Well then," said he, "I am fairly puzzled."

"Come in and sit down with us, and you shall hear all."

"Very well, on condition I may finish your fruit whilst I listen."

He had to hear the repetition of the history, which we have already spared our readers.

At the end he congratulated Annie heartily, (which Mrs. Elton had quite forgotten to do); and said he only hoped they would be successful in finding her father, and also that he would turn out better than present circumstances made him appear.

In talking it over, Annie frequently alluded to the singular *chances* which had brought things about.

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Elton, "at Bath I once heard an excellent sermon on the duty of thankfulness, for a most bountiful harvest after one quite the reverse. The clergyman alluded to people looking upon such things as the result of *chance*, 'but, said he, there is no such word in the Christian's vocabulary as *chance*.' Bear that in mind through life. Trace everything back to the Great First Cause of all. The Christian's God cannot be chance, but the infidel's chance is our God."

They were silent a minute, and then he said, "Now there is the lunch bell, so let us go in and introduce our new acquaintance, and see how mystified Ella will be."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MISSIONARY MEETING.

THE wonder of every one was manifest, as Mr. Elton led Miss Mills in to the lunch-room, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure of introducing Miss Thorley to you all!"

Some looked at one, some at another: Ella exclaimed, "Pa, 't isn't, why we all know Miss Mills."

"Really, Miss Ella, I beg to inform you that none of us know such a lady."

"Papa! what can you mean?"

"Simply what I say, my dear." Seeing Mr. Wilton look as if he really fancied Mr. Elton was out of his mind, he added: "Wilton, we are often told that we don't know our best friends; now I am not going to argue a point as to whether this young lady is our best friend or not: it is nothing to the purpose, so we will spare her blushes, if she will only be less lavish of them herself; but I assure you that we never knew Miss Thorley before to-day, and our friend Miss Mills is no more."

Worse and worse! Mr. Wilton saw there was some joke in the whole affair, but at present it was

unfathomable. So he said: "Well, Sir, I have no doubt we shall be favoured with an explanation of your logic presently."

All lunch time the young people kept addressing Annie as Miss Mills, in fact so did Mr. and Mrs. Elton; but Ella "was determined *she* should never call her anything else."

After lunch, Mr. Elton asked Miss Thorley many questions as to her certainty of her mother being as she had represented herself, but was soon convinced that all was true: he congratulated her sincerely again; as he said, "A Mother is the most invaluable friend of any young person; the most precious gift God can give to a young girl."

The week was spent in exploring all the well known nooks and corners. Sunday came round.—Mr. Elton preached in the morning, his sermons were excellent, but from having a very heavy monotonous delivery, they too frequently lulled his congregation to sleep. When will elocution and oratory be made subjects of more importance in preparing our young men for a life of public speaking? What a vast amount of worth, goodness, and extensive influence is lost for want of them! In the afternoon Mr. Wilton preached a sermon, absolutely inferior in composition, but far surpassing his rector's in effect. Not a sleepy eye to be seen, but many a moistened one, as with heart-stirring ardour he drove the truth home to their consciences.

The notice was given for the missionary meeting to take place the following evening, in the school-room. Monday nothing was seen of the curate all day, excepting for a hasty dinner, when he looked pale and haggard, as if he had been up all night. Mr. Elton joked him on looking nervous, and being afraid of his village audience, and advised him to spend no more time in preparing for the event, but to take his horse and have a good gallop over the down. He smiled, (he seldom laughed,) at Mr. Elton's rallying manner, but assured him he was not half so much afraid of the villagers as he was of him ! True enough.

In the evening the little room was crowded to excess, (it did not hold above a hundred.) The rectory party, augmented by a few of the neighbouring clergy, entered punctual to the time appointed.

Mr. Elton took the chair, and opened the meeting in the usual manner, by prayer for God's blessing on their proceedings, and that He would grant success to their feeble endeavours to diffuse the knowledge of His truth.

He then addressed a few words to his people, explaining the object and necessity of the Society : he said he did not hold the meeting so much for the sake of getting money from them, (although that would be thankfully accepted by him, as God's agent, and also would be pleasing to God, who loves

a cheerful giver, and blessed the widow's mite as much as any of David's or Solomon's gifts,) but he wished them to become interested in the fate of their brethren all over the world, remembering that they are all children of the same Father; and he was sure that when they came to learn the sad, ignorant state of many of their fellow-creatures, it would move their hearts to pity, to thankfulness, and to prayer. Prayer every one could give, and it would bring down blessings which money could not. He ended by expressing his regret that their little village was not considered of sufficient importance for a deputation to attend, but this year, at any rate, they were well provided, for as Mr. Wilton had visited several foreign countries, no doubt he could and would bring forward many interesting facts which would have the further advantage of being related by an eyewitness.

As he ceased, and looked round to Mr. Wilton, he observed him paler than ever, so much so that he feared he really was ill; however, he rose immediately; the people whispered to each other at his appearance.

He, however, got better as he became roused by his subject. He related many and wonderful instances of the wickedness and cruelty of those nations who know not our God. He continued speaking for three-quarters of an hour, pouring forth information in one unbroken stream of eloquence: he de-

picted the misery of such people as live in sin and die in ignorance of a happy hereafter.

At length he stopped abruptly ; and then with a sudden effort, as if making up his mind to some fearful step, he added : “ But there is even a worse state than that. We send our missionaries abroad to teach the ignorant, but surely their ignorance must be bliss in comparison to the nominal Christian who is *not* ignorant of the future, but *wilfully* blind ; who goes on sinning against conscience, to which he will not listen ; against the light of the Gospel, which he will not let himself believe ! or the infidel, who will not even know anything ; such a man reaches the moment of death, he sees its jaws open to receive him into the fearful abyss of hell, but *will* not repent, *will* not believe ! But at that last moment conscience *will* make itself heard. Belief *will* rush in with awful conviction to his mind. The sudden break of Gospel light bursts through the clouds and shows itself—truth.

“ Yes, my friends, at that last moment he believes—believes and trembles—when it is too late ! Yet, no ! I retract my words ; it is late—but not *too* late, so long as the gates of death have not closed upon him.”—He paused again. Then in a slow, tremulous voice said : “ That man is before you ! Mr. Elton told you I would relate stirring things of which I have been an eye-witness. Take my own history, and if it move some to repentance ere it be

too late, I shall have additional reason for gratitude—it may change the opinion kindly formed of me by many present, but I must risk that: it is my duty to them as well as to my God.”—His eye for a moment turned on Edith, (nor did his only,) but no sign of agitation was there further than a tear in each eye. He resumed, “My life for years was that of the most abandoned sinner; I stand before you a proof of the long suffering and patient mercy of God. I cannot tell you of anything which can awaken your consciences and rouse your hearts more than my own history. I had an excellent Christian mother, who would have had me love and follow her Saviour, but I wilfully despised her affectionate counsels, and followed my own sinful desires. She was poor, but deprived herself of everything, even of necessities, to indulge me, with the hope of winning me over to those paths which she so well knew were the paths of peace. But at length, in an evil hour, I made acquaintance with a character even worse than myself. He made money, by unfair means, as fast as we could want it. He was clerk in a merchant’s office: his master had taken him out of affection for his father, who had been his earliest friend; for the same reason, added to his own indolence of character, he placed too much confidence in my friend Harris. I say too much, not but that I believe that he was perfectly honest and upright when he went into the office;

but it is wrong to tempt young people ; he had every thing so under his control that it was easy to take money without detection : at first it was in small sums, and when we were in great need ; then it became easier and easier to make false entries, and, when money was brought, to say it had not been : he knew his master would not look into the books until they were made up at the end of the year. They say a rolling stone gathers no moss, but a ball of mud keeps adding to its mire and filth as it moves along. And so does wickedness—the ball must be stopped at once, or who can tell how large it will grow, and the ball of sin goes down hill faster and faster, gathering as it grows.

“ But as Christmas drew near we knew there must be a reckoning and an exposure : he then made a deeper plunge into vice ; he forged a cheque for a large sum, and with it we absconded. We went first to Canada, then to the gold fields of California, then to Port Natal ; we tried everywhere, but ill success and our consciences went with us. At last we went to Australia, and joined a party going to the diggings ; we got a little, but there ended our madly wicked career. Harris was taken ill with a sort of cholera. His agony was excruciating : he had no one besides myself with him. I tried to cheer him, and said he would soon be well, and we should be jolly again, as we called it ; but he groaned, ‘ never.’ I soon found that at this his last hour,

conscience was goading him with reproaches. Once he said, ‘Oh Ned, I don’t care for the pain, it is not that; this is nothing to what I am going to suffer.’ I said, ‘what can you mean?’ He said, ‘*mean!* Oh Ned, I was not brought up the rascal I have been, and I have made you as bad; I have made you believe there is no God!’ He then ceased speaking, for the death-struggle had begun; I knew not what to say. After some moments of intense anguish, he opened his eyes, started up in bed, and gasped out, ‘Ned, save yourself!—there is a God, I know it;—and there is a hell—and I am going there.’ He fell back, and died in my arms; but those awful words never died from my brain, they were burnt in for ever! My younger friends, remember this; avoid evil associates as you would a poison; ‘no one can touch pitch and not be defiled,’ and ‘no one goes alone to heaven or hell,’ as an old writer said; they take those with them whom they have influenced; oh what a reason then to avoid bad company! both for the evil it brings on yourself, and for your evil influence on others.

“But I must hasten on, or I shall detain you too long. As soon as he was buried, and I had gathered together our few possessions, I left the spot. On reaching Sydney, I fell in with two apparently very steady fellows; they were namesakes, both named Wilton, and cousins. They were just going to sail for Canterbury settlement, where, they said, they were

going to establish themselves as farmers ; and after a little more talk, they asked my plans. I had none : I could not run away from myself, and that was all I wanted to do. They said they were going there because it was such a nice, well-organized settlement, with regular clergy, &c. ; they had been brought up what I might think strictly, but at any rate they missed their Church and quiet Sundays, and were going where they hoped to find it was all more like the old country. It seemed to me that that must be what I wanted. I was certain there was a God, a heaven, a hell ; my dying friend's testimony had made me believe again. It must have been God working in my hard heart, still drawing me with 'the cords of love ;' at any rate I agreed to go with them. I thought that in different circumstances, and with different associates, I could be quite a reformed character. I did not know that that had little or nothing to do with it ; that so long as my heart remained unchanged, I could only love sin. And now, mothers ! I call for your particular attention to what I have to say ; your prayers for your children are not lost ! you may not live to see them turn out what you wish, but pray on, oh pray and don't be weary ! At this very time my mother was dying. On reaching Australia I had written her one of my wicked, heartless letters, demanding money, when I knew she had none ! On leaving Sydney I gave my address to the post-master for any letter to be for-

warded, and also wrote again to my mother, telling her I was going to New Zealand. We had been at Canterbury about a month, when a letter came informing me that my mother was dead. She had on her death-bed or in her will, expressed her belief that her unceasing prayers for me would yet be answered, although she should not live to know it. Her faith and prayers have, through God's mercy, saved me."

A faint shriek from Miss Thorley caused him to stop; she had in this history, ending as it had done, recognized her old friend's son. Every one in the assembly was more or less moved at such a recital. Soon, cries of "Go on, go on!" arose; he turned to Mr. Elton, as if for permission, and said something of having detained them too long already; Mr. Elton could scarcely speak, but moved his head for him to proceed: he continued:—

"I then made a vow that I would forsake my past sins, but here again I erred! What was a vow made in dependance only on my *own* strength? A rainbow promise without God in the cloud! My new friends were always kind to me, but I soon fell off from my newly assumed steadiness; I took to drinking, and at length they shunned me. They were both younger than I, but the elder tried to expostulate with me; we were alone at the time. I was not sober then, and would not bear the just reproof: maddened with anger and drink, I hit him; he fell

forward senseless ; I thought I had killed him ; (I am thankful to say I did not, and he is now one of my best and dearest friends :) however, under the impression that I had done so, I rushed home, packed up my few things, and before next morning dawned, I reached the nearest port, and went on board a ship just starting for Plymouth. I was now worse than ever ; in my sober moments my friend Harris' words rung in my ears, and in my drunken hours the spectre of my murdered friend haunted me. We had a chaplain on board ; ere we had been many days at sea he spoke to me : it was a Sunday, and he had noticed my absence from the service which had been performed ; he spoke kindly and calmly, as if he expected opposition, but had a duty to perform. My better spirit was upon me : I listened. He continued, and got more energetic ; at length we had to part for dinner, but what he had said had, through God's mercy and blessing, caused a change in me : he had more particularly urged me to seek God's strength ; he told me all resolutions made in my own would be worse than useless. After dinner I went to my cabin, and found on my locker a Bible and two or three tracts. I sat down and read till I could read no longer ; I felt I must pray, but did not know how ; I fastened my door, and knelt down then and there, but not one word could I say : I had never knelt since I had done so at my mother's knee. I sobbed for very grief at the low state into which I

had fallen, and felt relieved by it. At length I said, 'Oh, God, help me,' but the very sound of such words from my own lips seemed to terrify me. I do not remember anything else, it was getting very dark, and I heard a great deal of confusion on deck. I knew it could not yet be evening; in a few moments I heard a terrific peal of thunder, and the captain's voice giving commands. I went up on deck, and found almost every one assembled there in evident fear; the chaplain was on his knees. The most awful storm was rising. In a few minutes we seemed surrounded by lightning, whilst the war of the wind, waves, and thunder was perfectly appalling. We all gathered round the captain or the chaplain, according as we looked for temporal or spiritual help. I did not care to live, but I was afraid to die. The chaplain caught my eye, and beckoned me to him. I knelt by him and trembled at the eternity which was before me; he spoke kindly and cheerily to me, and exhorted me to look to God for help. 'Oh,' said I, 'if I should escape this time, I pray God to enable me to live a new life, and devote myself to His service.' He then offered up prayers for us all, but in the midst of it there was a fearful crash. We had struck on a rock. The captain shouted for the boats to be lowered. I was a good swimmer, and asked if we were near land; he said he thought so, but he did not know where. I resolved on jumping overboard and swimming for it. I did so, but in the

darkness of the storm and approaching evening combined, I could not see where I was. I battled with the waves until I was quite exhausted, and then drifted with them. I was carried inland and back again several times, until a wave threw me high on land, but with such a blow as stunned me. I know not how long I lay there, but when I came to my senses again I was back in the ship. She was not much injured by the blow, but as I was missed they sent out a boat to seek for me, and so my life was spared, for I had been thrown on a perfectly barren rock. As soon as we were all tolerably settled again, and I was recovered from the indisposition produced by the accident, I sought for the chaplain to advise and assist me. I told him all my past life—I felt as if I was consulting a doctor, and must tell him all ere he could prescribe for me. I told him that now in God's strength I hoped and intended by my future life to evince the sincerity of my repentance. I sought instruction from him in every way ; for, indeed, I was quite ignorant of the way of salvation. We used to talk together constantly during the remainder of the voyage, and I disclosed to him my wish to follow out my dear mother's wishes by entering the Church, but I felt unworthy of such a sacred office. In time he removed my doubts, for, as he said, no one indeed was worthy, but the merciful God accepts our desires and motives, and assists us in our earnest endeavours to serve him—I have no more to tell

you, my friends, of the incidents of my life, and must leave the application to other hands. I stand before you to-night a memento of the mercies of an ever-patient Father, and only beg and entreat every one of you to believe in Him, 'to trust Him even though you cannot trace Him.' Christ is *in* all, and must *be* all."

He sat down, evidently much overcome, and there were few in the room who did not feel their hearts roused to better things.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ARBOUR.

THE meeting closed rather abruptly ; every one felt too agitated from one cause or other to lengthen it. Mr. Elton gave out the doxology and after it had been sung he pronounced the benediction. The assembly silently dispersed. Mr. Wilton had placed himself behind Mr. Elton, shading his face with his hands : he felt that he had done his duty, but at the same time fully realized that his future happiness, in consequence, was sacrificed.

After such a disclosure was it likely Mr. Elton would give him Edith ? His conscience and his heart united in a negative reply. His character had been blotted by the foulest crimes ; but still, was it not better to have acted as he had done than to have won her under false impressions ? His mind was a whirlpool of determination and doubt. Should he seek Mr. Elton and ask a decision at once ? It was sure to be against his hopes and wishes ; so wherefore subject himself to hearing his own opinion confirmed ? Should he, without any intimation of his intentions, go home, pack up his books, &c., and leave early next

morning? No: that would be cowardly as well as unjust towards those who had been more than commonly kind to him.—What should he do?

He was not left to determine; in a few minutes, (which seemed hours to him,) a hand was laid on his shoulder: he looked up, scarcely knowing where he was, and found himself alone with Mr. Elton!

“They are all gone, come home,” said Mr. Elton, as he took his arm and led him away, across a field at the back of the school, so that the many who were still hanging about in the little street, did not even know when they left the room. Wilton was like a child caught in a guilty act, he felt that his time was come, he offered no resistance. They walked on silently; it was a delicious moonlight night, and a soft, balmy, soothing sort of breeze fanning them, Mr. Elton quietly removed his companion’s hat, as well as his own, so that the air played on and cooled his forehead.

When they reached the garden all was still, but they saw lights moving in the various rooms: we say they, but in truth Wilton never raised his eyes from the ground: many an evening had he watched the light in one window, and enjoyed his own thoughts the while; *now* he dare not raise his eyes to the window, more than his thoughts, to the occupant of that chamber.

He was going into the house, but Mr. Elton said, “Don’t go in, Wilton; they will not be ready for

supper for this half-hour yet, come in here ;” and he led him into the arbour, where Mrs. Elton and Miss Thorley had talked of him the week before. Poor Wilton followed in a mechanical way, he seemed scarcely to know what he did or where he went, he was in a dreamy state of misery.

They sat down. Mr. Elton did not speak ; it would have been as impossible as ridiculous to attempt a conversation on indifferent topics. Wilton did not know what to do or say. He bowed his head down on his crossed arms, which rested on the table, and sat some minutes perfectly still. Mr. Elton felt it was best for him to recover himself before he was obliged to speak ; at length he sighed, a deep, sobbing sigh, and said :

“ Thank God, it is all over now ! ”

Mr. Elton laid his hand on his arm with a kindly pressure, and added :

“ Yes, Wilton, thank God, for you have acted nobly, and can have nothing to regret.”

“ Nothing ! Oh Mr. Elton, do not say so ; I have done my duty, and I do heartily thank God for having enabled me to do it ; but by it I have sacrificed all that is dear to me in this world. It was a hard struggle, and again I thank God that He enabled me to overcome ; I could not be a hypocrite amongst you. I could not go on winning what is dearer to me than life itself, under a false appearance of goodness. She is too good ; too pure ever to be sacrificed

to such a vile character, but I even feel grateful that I have made the sacrifice to add to her happiness ; and it must do so eventually ; she will, I trust, soon cease to think of me ; I am unworthy of a thought, much less a regret from her ; but I must not, cannot see her again ; you will allow me, I hope, to leave you at once,—to-morrow morning early. I am very sorry to behave in any such unhandsome manner, and put you to inconvenience, but indeed I cannot bear to see her again, and know I have lost her.”

Mr. Elton said, “ My dear fellow, you are going faster than I can follow you. You have not spoken to Edith since the meeting, and I am sure you could not have told her all before ? Stay a bit and see.”

“ Stay a bit and see ! Mr. Elton, what do you say ? you would not add to my misery, you are too kind for that. I tell you Edith cannot think of me again, and even if *she* would wish it, *you*, as her father, are bound to forbid it.”

Mr. Elton replied : “ I shall do nothing of the sort. I have every confidence in my Edith’s opinion, and I promise you that you shall stand or fall by her decision ; if I know my child as I think I do, you will stand no worse in her estimation than you did before. She knows well we are not to be judges of each other : a bad character or unprincipled man would never gain her affections, but a reformed one would appear in a very different light, without having won her esteem as you have already done. She will

never condemn one whom her Heavenly Father has forgiven."

Wilton could say nothing at first; the new hope rushed in too quickly on his late despair, for him to believe in it yet. After a few moments' pause, he endeavoured to stammer out something, of what he really felt towards Mr. Elton for his generous feeling, but it was useless; he stopped short, and sobbed as only a man can sob, and as no one would wish to witness a second time.

Mr. Elton rose, and said: "Come, my dear fellow, calm yourself. I understand all this, but we will talk it over to-morrow; I shall leave you here, the cool night air will compose you; when the supper-bell rings, join us as usual, or retire, which you please."

He went into the house, and found all the family assembled in the dining-room, excepting Edith. Mrs. Elton said she was in her own room, and did not intend to come down; adding, "Poor child, she is very wretched; I had no idea she was so deeply attached to him, and she confessed that she fears he will do something desperate before we have time to say a word; and then I can see that she is also a little bit afraid of how it is to end, and what you will say to it all."

"Well then, my dear, I think I had better go and see her at once; it will not do to leave her all night in suspense."

“Oh but, Walter, have you made up your mind?”

“No, my love, she must do that for me.”

Mrs. Elton followed her husband from the room, and in a few minutes returned, looking satisfied if not pleased, and said, “Well, I think that all who want supper had better begin, Papa will be back soon.”

In a quarter of an hour Mr. Elton returned, saying, “I think I have at any rate dispelled her fears for the present :”—and he looked rather merry.

Had any one watched the proceedings, they would have seen him come from Edith’s room shortly after he went in, with the tearful, agitated girl hanging fondly on his arm ; he led her quietly down stairs to the library, then went out through the drawing-room window, across the lawn to the arbour, whence he returned with Wilton, whom he also ushered into the library, and there left them together.

The supper was removed, and the prayer-bell rung, and then appeared Mr. Wilton, with Edith on his arm ; she walked up direct to her mother, and laid her head weeping on her bosom.

We need tell no more. It was settled. We all know what *it* means, and what *settled* means, without parsing the connection between them or between the lovers. If they were not to be personal pronouns or active verbs, let them be what a French writer beautifully says man and wife should be:—“The

noun is the husband and the wife the adjective which should always agree with the noun.”

Little more of any note occurred during Annie's stay at Eversfield. Letters frequently arrived from Reginald and his wife, always speaking of their happiness. She had to hear of it and bear it as best she could, and that was not badly.

At the expiration of her month's visit, she returned to Rouen; she soon persuaded her mother to come and reside in the same house as herself, and the additional room was easily procured next to her own.

Madame Girard was duly informed of all that was requisite for her to know, in order to understand the position of the parties; the remainder was left to her lively French imagination to supply, and no doubt it fully answered the call made upon its resources.

As October drew near, the mother and daughter had many consultations as to the desirableness of continuing or relinquishing her pupils. As far as pecuniary circumstances were concerned, it could have been dispensed with. Mrs. Thorley's own means were rather limited, but, although she had never appropriated any of the annuity provided by her husband for her own personal use, she would have had no scruple in taking it for her daughter.

The avocation itself had its charms for Annie; she was passionately fond of teaching, and was become interested in and attached to her pupils. She also

felt that it would be an ungenerous return for all Mme. Girard's kindness, not to fall in with her plans as far as she could ; she therefore decided on continuing her Governess until the spring, but refused to accompany her to London, for the months she was to be there.

It so happened that very soon after Christmas the worthy Mrs. Bradley removed from Dorchester Place to a nice airy street very near the Orthopedic Hospital, so her rooms were at once bespoken for Madame Girard and her family for the following April.

Mrs. Thorley and Annie grew daily more devoted to each other, and happier together.

Annie was not a very demonstrative girl, so indulged in no rapturous expressions of affection for her mother, or of delight at her own happiness, but there was a constant thoughtful watchfulness for the comfort of her parent, and a calm sunshine in her own placid countenance which told it all.

Mrs. Elton and she corresponded more frequently, more affectionately than ever ; they had many additional interesting topics in common now. She was to go to Eversfield again in May ; ere, as they laughingly said, she established herself as an independent lady.

She therefore escorted Madame Girard to London, and remained a week with her there, to see her comfortably settled.

Mrs. Thorley remained at Rouen, always in the

anxious hope of her husband coming; but it was becoming more and more improbable, for he had not been there now for more than eighteen months.

Her health was now getting very delicate, more so than she had let Annie at all suspect, or the affectionate girl would not have left her. At times she suffered greatly, and had little doubt of the nature of her disease. Whilst Annie was absent she went to Paris for advice, and there her worst fears were confirmed. An internal cancer was forming, and the medical men concurred in the opinion that her life would not be prolonged many months. The trial was fearful. The anticipation of so much suffering, which no human art or science could materially alleviate, the thought of leaving her child again unprotected in the world, and the craving desire to find her husband, which became more intense than ever—all, all, united in producing anxiety, which told sadly on her worn out constitution. She determined not to alloy her darling's happiness by saying anything of it ere her return; she wrote to her frequently and cheerfully, and after her letter was finished she would lay down her pen and weep sad tears, mingled with earnest prayer that God, who was thus afflicting her, would be with her in her sorrow, and give her strength and patience to bear all.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BELLS.

THERE was a happy, joyous party at Eversfield. Alfred, the sailor, was returned from his first long voyage, laden with curiosities and wonderful stories, to which Ella listened with unbounded delight.

The second son was also there to meet him, and to enjoy a rest after the extra study he had had previous to his examinations, which he had passed with great éclat ; he was to return to his *ci-devant* master as junior pupil in August. Edith and Mr. Wilton were —well, what can we say ? as happy as any pair of lovers could be, who were sure of each other's affection and full confidence ; no cloud had risen to obscure their sunshine, and they were looking forward to being married ere Charles left home, that he might draw up the marriage settlement.

Reginald and his wife were still abroad ; she had a little, very little baby boy, which, with all other young mammas, she thought incomparable. She had passed a very bad winter ; her chest and lungs were so delicate that he had not dared to bring her to England, but hoped to come over for a month,

to be present at Edith's wedding, and return again to Nice for the winter.

Mr. and Mrs. Elton were happy in the happiness of their children. Mr. Elton had lost a great deal of hair, and what remained was fast turning grey, all very becoming to a grandpapa; but Mrs. Elton *would* not show any signs of age; she was lively and active as ever, and not a white hair could be seen in her still glossy ringlets, so that her husband often said she did not deserve the honour of being a grandmother, and he should henceforth introduce her as his eldest daughter.

Annie Thorley was received almost into the number of children, all loved her so much; she had now been there about three weeks.

The little village was much the same as on her previous visit, but not so its inhabitants, more especially the younger part of Mr. Elton's flock. That awful visitor, diphtheria, had been amongst them, and taken off many children, sometimes three or four of a family. The adult portion had escaped; some had been attacked, but not fatally. At the Rectory, Edith and Ella had both been sufferers, but not severely, and it had now, to all appearance, left the village; no fresh instances had been heard of for upwards of a month, and the poor mourning survivors at length hoped that their firesides would lose no more of the cheerful little faces that had once gladdened them.

Mr. Wilton had been indefatigable in attention and kindness to all ; he was more beloved than ever, now that his connection with Edith was become known, and he was always spoken of with the greatest affection, as "Miss Edith's nice gentleman."

He was riding home one evening after some of his parochial visits ; it had been a lovely afternoon, and as he entered the village he heard the bells ringing merry peals, for he had that morning united a hard-working, well-to-do young carpenter, to a thrifty farmer's daughter. We ought not to peep into people's hearts, I suppose, any more than into their letters ; they may both contain secrets ; but sometimes hearts can be read in faces ; and Wilton's thoughts certainly were, "Ah ! those bells will ring for my precious Edith and me next ; God grant that I may make her as happy as she deserves to be."

Soon a saddened, shady look, passed over his beaming countenance, as he drew nearer to the churchyard, and saw the many newly filled graves ; and he then thought, (as we still read his thoughts,) "I wonder whose will be next ? I should think poor Jim Reynolds ; he is very ill, and over eighty."

He then put his horse into a little trot, for the church clock struck six, and that was the hour for tea at the rectory ; moreover, if he were late he was sure to lose his place by Edith, for Ella or Alfred would take it, and be so very blind when he came in that no hints would suffice to make them relinquish

it. He was going down a very gentle declivity, when somehow his horse stepped on a round stone, which slipped with him; he stumbled, and could not recover himself; down he went, and in falling, came upon Wilton's leg, in such a manner that he could not extricate himself. In struggling to gain his feet again, the creature rolled over and over, crushing and lacerating the leg in a fearful manner. People soon ran to his assistance, and he was carried to the Rectory in an agony of suffering. Dr. Morris was quickly on the spot, and seemed very hopeful. He said the laceration was something dreadful, but that, as far as he could at present observe, no bones were broken; nor did he think any muscles or tendons were seriously injured; the only fear he felt, was whether any important nerve had been severed.

The patient was in the best house for kind and watchful nurses; Mrs. Elton sat up with him that night, and the next day she obtained the assistance of a very efficient nurse.

Dr. Morris saw him early next morning, and pronounced that he was doing as well as possible; his sufferings were, and probably would be very great, and it must be several weeks ere he could leave his room, so they must keep him as cheerful as they could, and in a day or two let him have plenty of society, and he looked mischievously at the blushing Edith.

Mrs. Elton knew how anxious each lover was apart,

so took her work into the patient's room for the afternoon, and told Edith to bring the book they were reading aloud, as it must be finished that day, to be returned to the library ; similar excuses were frequently found, so that the young people enjoyed each other's society.

All went on well for four or five days, when a fearful change took place. Dr. Morris's fears were realized ; a nerve or nerves had been divided, and tetanus ensued. Wilton's sufferings now became too intense for Edith to be permitted to be in the room ; her mother deeply regretted the necessity, but saw the prudence of the step. A few hours and Edward Wilton was no more ! The next bell tolled for him ! It was an event that was felt deeply in every cottage of Eversfield. Many a heart had responded to his appeal at the Missionary meeting of the previous summer, and blessed him for it. All looked up to him as something above the common. He seemed to carry the very presence of God with him into their homes. He could sympathize with the wicked ; he had felt, (as they did,) the strong power of temptation, and many, through his influence, had been brought also to feel and bow beneath the stronger power of the Holy Spirit. Oh where should they find such another !

At the rectory the grief was far, far beyond description or expression. They put on the deepest mourning, for, in a few weeks, would he not have been

their son, their brother, and *her* husband? Poor widowed Edith, God help thee! The blow at first stunned her.—So much joy and happiness within immediate reach, and then snatched from her grasp in an instant! It was sufficient to paralyze a stronger, older person,—a mind more inured to sorrow,—but our gentle Edith was so young, and had been so tenderly nurtured in the lap of affection, luxury and happiness; that grief was new to her.

Day by day her cheek grew paler; her eye more dim and sunken, her step less elastic, and smiles had taken their last farewell of those sweet lips to which the rosy pink never returned.

Still, no murmur, no word of complaint; all submission and resignation! Every one vied with others in showering additional fondness and gentle kindness on the afflicted pet of the family; all was received with endearing gratitude, but that young heart was broken.—She did not die.—Broken hearts do not always; they live on under the weight of grief, too crushed to rise to life again, but still, they live, patiently waiting the time till death comes with a friendly stroke to take them from their sorrow.

She lived many years to do good and to be a blessing to all around her. The thought of Edward was always present, and she strove to carry out his views, and live worthy of him. She acknowledged the rod which dealt the stroke. In the silent communings with her own heart she discovered that a

shrine there had been robbed of its idol. God had taken the idol from her worship, and put Himself in its place, and henceforth her life should be devoted to Him. She felt the Fatherly mercy that had thus saved her from sin, and drawn her affections heavenward.

As time wore on she entered more into life's realities. Her new Master would not suffer idlers in His vineyard; He has work for all. She soon found that a single woman has many duties allotted to her which cannot be performed by the devoted wife and mother. To those duties, (now become hers,) she roused her energies, and it shortly became apparent who was the instigator of many excellent changes in the parish. She had her Bible classes for girls too old for the village school, and yet too ignorant to be left to contend alone with the world and its insinuating temptations. She had classes of an evening for reading, writing, and other secular knowledge. She had working classes for the married or single who were not adroit needle-women. She had a Savings Bank, which enabled many a girl to take a little sum of money to her husband at her bridal breakfast. In fact, she proposed and carried out, steadily and perseveringly, every plan that could improve the spiritual or temporal welfare and comfort of the female villagers, and which could be accomplished efficiently, only by a woman. She was happy, as every one must be who fulfils their mission

on earth. The consciousness of heartily doing one's duty in spite of adverse circumstances or against inclination must produce content. To labour for our Heavenly Master, with the consequent certainty of His approval, must bring its own reward; and if, as we are warranted in inferring from the inspired Word, only those who have known sorrow themselves, can successfully comfort the mourner, Edith was now enabled to convey consolation from her own stricken heart to those who like her had tasted the bitterness of bereavement. Joyful she never was again. A cloud had hidden her earthly sunshine for ever, but she knew that that cloud had a silver lining. There was nothing morbid or selfish in her joylessness. She would exert herself to the utmost to procure and augment the happiness of others, and would, outwardly, partake of it for fear she should seem, by a saddened manner, to damp their merriment; but her heart was not in it. No one ever again heard the ringing laugh of her earlier days. Her youth was gone. It almost added to her charms; such a subdued, softened melancholy in one so young was attractive and winning to many; and more than one, in the course of time, earnestly, perseveringly sought her hand, but all alike met with the same gentle but firm refusal. Her widowed heart was waiting patiently to be reunited with its first and only love, alike waiting for her in heaven.

We must leave her to do the work and, at the last,

to receive the reward of the good and faithful servant, but we would have others learn from her that woman can be a blessing, and fulfil an important mission on earth without being married ; instead of wasting the best part of life and its energies in looking forward to what may never occur. Let them do the daily work God provides for all, and which is probably to be *the* work of their life, however much they may strive to be blind to it. There the task is, there the talents are, which He means to be used in His service, and for which He will demand the account, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy strength."

CHAPTER XXII.

EARTH FOR TOIL, HEAVEN FOR REST.

LET us return with Annie Thorley to Rouen. She needed not to wait for her mother to tell her she was ill; the sadly altered appearance bespoke it. There could be no mistaking that worn look, the effect of intense bodily pain or mental anxiety, or both. She was more changed than could have been thought possible in so short a time. At length she told all to the sorrow-stricken young listener; the visit to Paris, the medical opinion, all was confessed. In the midst of the poignant grief produced by the recital Annie was thankful! Thankful that she had returned before her mother was worse; thankful for the mother's affection, which had refused to give her pain whilst in the full enjoyment of pleasure; thankful that that mother had been restored to her care, and not left to suffer and die alone; thankful that she had relinquished her engagement to Madame Girard; and thankful, oh, how thankful, that God now gave her the opportunity of testifying her love and gratitude to the parent who had suffered so much for her.

Mrs. Thorley grew worse almost daily, and sunk far more rapidly than the doctors had anticipated. Her life had been one of such suffering, anxiety, and privation, that nature had no power longer to resist.

They left Rouen for the quiet little village where Mrs. Thorley had resided before joining her daughter. Her cheerful bed-room, to which she was soon confined, looked out on a pretty country burial-ground, which seemed to invite the weary pilgrim to rest beneath its velvet sod. There were many trees and shrubs carefully tended by the survivors of those who lay there. One seemed a special favourite with Mrs. Thorley, and one evening she told Annie what thoughts it created in her mind :

“ You cannot think how much time I spend in my contemplations on that larch and the ivy clinging to it. It seems to me such an emblem of Christian life.”

Annie confessed she did not see in what way.

“ My dear, I think all those curving branches so like the Christian’s struggle to reach heaven ; the little pendant branches are the troubles and temptations that strive to drag him down to earth ; but the higher he rises in heart and soul towards God the less they become ; there they are, you see, getting smaller and smaller towards the upper end of each branch, and towards the top of the tree : the trunk is our earthly frame, with our soul attached to it,

but the little branches are our thoughts, aspiring after better things. One would almost expect to see them fly upwards if they were suddenly severed from the tree. Oh, the larch was always a favourite with me from its graceful, airy elegance, and since I have read this little moral from it I like it better than ever." She paused, and then added :

"Annie, I should like one planted over my grave : it gives more cheerful thoughts than the weeping willow, which hangs down towards earth as if all its hopes lay buried in the grave at its foot : the willow is death, but the larch is the resurrection."

Poor Annie always strove to restrain all appearance of grief before her mother, but the present allusion to the grave, which must so soon leave her again alone in the world, was too much ; for a few minutes she was silent, but her tears quickly fell on her work. Her mother observed it, and drawing her head to her bosom caressed it, and sighed deeply. This only made Annie much worse ; she sobbed for some time, and her mother's tears mingled with hers. She, however, controlled herself, and whispered : "Annie, my precious Annie, this is wrong in both of us. Let us strive to *feel* what we *know*—that all is for the best, and to be thankful for the mercy which united us."

"Oh, but mother dear, to be alone again !"

"Lonely, my darling, but not alone ! The Father of the fatherless will always watch over you. Oh

Annie, if I dared wish still with earthly desire, how I would wish and pray to see your father once more ; but promise me that after I am gone, you will always do all in your power to find him, and make him think of me kindly."

"Mother dear, I cannot promise it. How can I do so? He who has caused you so much suffering, so overladen you with grief as to have shortened your days ; oh ! God forgive me, but I feel that I can never love or forgive him."

"My child,—'forgive us our trespasses, *as we* forgive them that trespass against us.' As I hope for acceptance with my Maker, I can truly say, that from my heart I forgive anything that there may have been requiring pardon ; but how uselessly then have I endeavoured to impress on your mind, that I am the erring one ; it is he who has to forgive."

"Never, mother dear, I never can feel it."

"May God yet soften my child's heart, and may I yet live to know that she joins with me in the wish to see her father again."

Many such conversations took place, but as Mrs. Thorley's sufferings increased, and her end drew rapidly nearer, they were perforce shorter. The invalid seemed withdrawing herself from this world, and all its hopes and wishes but *one* ; and that one wish seemed absorbing ; it became her daily, hourly prayer, that she might yet see her wandering husband.

By dint of constantly talking to her daughter about

it, she gradually gained her over to express the same desire ; at first it was only from the secondary motive of wishing to please her dying mother ; then it was as a duty, for her mother succeeded in convincing her, that if he were ever so much to blame, still he was her *parent*, and as such her filial duty remained the same, and then at last, as her future loneliness pressed itself upon her attention, she began to wish it on her own account.

One evening they were watching the sun set across the churchyard ; Annie suddenly exclaimed, “ Mother, you never told me your emblematic meaning of the ivy.”

“ No, darling, nor can I take credit of its being original, only in part. I was once much struck by a clergyman, likening the ivy and the oak to the union between the Christian and his Saviour. So long as the ivy clings firmly to the oak, no storm can injure it, but once severed from its support, it is weak and powerless to withstand the tempest ; but then I think so many people are disposed to imagine that we have additional trials, in *consequence* of acknowledging Christ as our Master. It appears to me an injustice ; at least in these days, when happily people are not persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The sweeping blast attacks the ivy equally, whether it be united firmly to the oak or torn from it ; the difference is not in the attack, but in the strength with which it can withstand. The same sorrow

which would crush a heart not united to Christ, would have comparatively little effect, when that heart is supported by divine strength; so that the Christian is in every way the gainer by his choice. An old proverb says, crosses are the steps of the ladder which leads to heaven."

"Mother, do you remember dear old George Herbert's little poem, called 'The Pulley?'"

"Oh, well! And what can surpass his beautiful idea, that when God created man, He gave him every blessing to enjoy in this world, but reserved *rest*, for fear he should be contented without God. Yes, earth for toil, and heaven for rest; and," added she in a low voice, "my rest is near.—God made man's heart for Himself, and it can never find rest or happiness on earth, or in heaven without Him.* Man's heart has been likened to a sea-bird, which has been carried far away inland. It has a constant instinctive yearning for something it cannot find, in fact it knows not what, or where to seek it. It sees the waves of the sea glittering in the sunshine, and thinks it has found what it misses; it flies towards it,—it was but the mirage of the desert.—It mounts the lofty peaks of shining mountains, and finds they are but glaciers, whose frozen summits reflect the sunbeams.—It beats itself against the rocks until

* "Oh God, thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is in unrest, until it rests in Thee."—*Augustine, Conf.*

exhausted—It soils its lovely feathers, which should be as silver, in some muddy pool, and covers itself with mire. Just when it is worn out with all the efforts of its life in seeking for the unknown something, and the poor bird is dying of despair, it hears a sound in the distance, it knows not what it is, but its instinct tells it that it is what it requires, and has sought so long; it is the billows of the ocean dashing on a far distant shore; with a last effort it plunges forward, and at the last moment finds itself where it would be.”

She paused. Perhaps nothing could have tended more towards strengthening Annie’s faith and trust in God, than witnessing, as she did daily, hourly, her mother’s perfect peace. After such a life of turmoil and trial, and with her present acute sufferings, (which she knew must increase until her frame could bear no more,) her trustful repose in God and resignation to His will, was a beautiful evidence of His supporting grace.

She often said, “Oh, if it were not for that *one* wish, how thankfully should I look forward to death, but God sees best still to keep one link drawing me downwards. It often strikes me that one grand promise is much neglected. Our Saviour has said, ‘That, if *two* of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it *shall* be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.’ It seems almost awful to think how much power is given to

us, and yet how reluctant we seem to avail ourselves of it. It is wonderful to think how many blessings and graces we require, and yet how seldom *only two* are found to agree in asking it. Oh Annie, let us agree in praying for your father; for his conversion, if he still be a wanderer from the fold, and for his restoration to us, if it be God's will, ere I die."

Annie thought of Edward Wilton, and his mother's unceasing prayers for him, and how they had been answered. She sank on her kness by her mother's side, and the two united heartily in the prayer.

When she rose again, her mother tenderly kissed her, and said, "If our prayer is not answered in the temporal sense, it surely will be in the spiritual; and that you have united with me in offering it, is an indescribable comfort; it is an assurance to me that my further wishes will be carried out by you, and that I may yet hope you will leave no effort untried to find your father, and be a daughter to him, as you are to me."

Annie softly whispered, "I promise you, dear mother."

"Thank you, and may God bless your exertions, my precious. One more cross is removed from my path. I shall pass my little remaining time more happily, more contentedly now. I know, if it is in God's plan for our good to see him again, He will bring it to pass, and if not, you will probably live

to see the reason. It is one of God's greatest mercies to us, to allow us to look back and see, by the effect, how much wiser His arrangements for us are, than if any of the projects we had formed and have been so anxious to have accomplished, could have succeeded. How thankful we often are that our own wishes were frustrated, when we learn, by after events, what misery they would have brought on us; and how it strengthens our faith for the future! No, Annie, strive always to keep your own nearest and dearest wishes in perfect subservience to His will. 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou *shalt* know hereafter.' That hereafter is soon to burst upon me."

Annie then left her mother, and went for her daily walk. She thought over all that had passed, more seriously than she had ever thought before: and—yes, she thought of Reginald Elton. Should she ever know why that one hope of her young heart had been thwarted? Why did those beautiful words now come to her mind?

"If but my fainting heart be blest,
With Thy sweet Spirit for its guest,
My God, to Thee I leave the rest,
Thy will be done!"

Because, (although she scarcely knew it, for she had not stopped to analyze her feelings yet,) that sweet Spirit was already in her heart, working for good, and she was, by it, being led on to desire more

of it. It is by God's grace that we are enabled to seek more grace.

But we must not linger too long over the closing scenes of Mrs. Thorley's life. We come to the last.

About a week more had elapsed since the conversation just related, — a sad week of excruciating agony. Pain was over now; the last few hours of life were ebbing fast, free from suffering, for mortification had set its seal. She lay quiet on her bed, awaiting the messenger, who would surely come to release her; talking from time to time, as much as weakness would allow her, but in disjointed sentences, still they were words of counsel and comfort, which would make indelible impression on Annie's affectionate heart. At times her mind seemed wandering back to scenes and wishes, in which her husband's name only was mentioned; at others collected and conscious to everything, and striving to alleviate Annie's intense grief, which was now beyond control. She knelt by the bedside, with her face bent down on her mother's hand, bathing it with her tears.

"Hush," almost screamed the dying woman, "there he is, it is his step—oh, Annie, run, run to your father!"

Annie saw how her mind was again wandering, and tried to calm her; she said, it was only the lodger in the next room, but she was not believed. The sound of the footsteps had ceased, and with it Mrs. Thorley sank back on her pillow, as if another

last hope had died with it. She softly whispered, "My God, thy will, not mine." Annie still knelt holding that precious hand, and her mother again spoke in broken sentences, but the end was very near.

"My child, I am *sure* you will see him again ; oh, for my sake love him—tell him I never ceased to love him—and oh, if I could but—but no, let me not rebel—it is, it *must* be best as it is—but I should have liked to hear his voice once more—to know he forgave and blessed me—do not let him grieve for me—."

The doctor was momentarily expected, but of what use now ? She was beyond the power of his art, even to ease or lengthen life ever so little : her body was at rest, and her soul longed to be free. Nevertheless, Annie heard his step at the door with that sort of relief one feels so long as there is anything, however hopeless, to cling to. She did not stir from her position, but in a moment her mother, in a voice too far gone to sound even excited, said :

"My Henry, my husband, I knew you would come—thank God."

The only reply was a stifled, sobbing groan. Annie looked up and saw a stranger bending over the face of her mother. *He* was come. Late, but not too late !

A few minutes passed ere any one broke the awful silence ; Thorley raised his wife's head to his breast,

and kissed her forehead, over which the death damp was fast collecting : he whispered, in a voice inarticulate from emotion, “ Oh, Maria, my wife, forgive me.”

“ I have nothing to forgive ; oh, Henry, how good God is to me ! forgive me ; your pardon was all I was waiting for : here she is,”—drawing Annie nearer, and putting her hand into her father’s, “ devote your life to *her* happiness—promise it me—I am going—Oh, God ! one minute more—love her as you would have loved me—Annie—your promise—don’t forget—God bless you both—thank God—peace—peace——” Her head fell on his shoulder, where it had so often longed to rest—but life was extinct—her soul was resting in heaven.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE scene, when all was over, was sad in the extreme. Captain Thorley's grief was almost like a child's at one minute, and uncontrollably frantic the next. His self-reproaches, though richly deserved, were not the less miserable to hear; he seemed to look to Annie for comfort; she, who was so desolate in her great sorrow, and was at that moment wanting her mother's presence more than ever to counsel and guide her. Young as she was, however, it occurred first to her to exert herself. She gently disengaged her mother's head from the shoulder on which it still rested, and laid it back on the pillow, impressing fervent kisses on the lifeless lips. Her father stood by and watched all; his grief was too deep, or too selfish, or his remorse too sincere to allow him to interfere with his child's movements; but when Annie's sorrow burst forth afresh, and she threw herself on the body in an agony of heart-broken despair, calling her mother back, as though her mind had given way under its heavy burden, he suddenly roused himself, and putting his arm round

her, gently led her from the room. He sunk into the nearest fauteuil, and drawing her down to him, placed her like a little child on his knee, sheltering her head on his bosom. Their tears flowed together for some time, but the action had a soothing tendency ; it imparted to Annie a feeling of protection, which something instinctively assured her would be hers henceforth.

After some minutes she seemed much more composed ; he very softly raised the unresisting face to his, and imprinting a kiss on her forehead, whispered : “ *My child*, never to be parted from me again ; may I only be able to win your love, little as I deserve it.” She remembered her promise to her mother, and felt that at that moment not to respond to his wish would have appeared sacrilege. She looked up timidly, and just articulated, “ Father, *she* loved you so dearly,”—and again burst into tears.

However, his caressing restored her, and she remembered there was much yet to be done, and night was fast approaching.

She left her father, under the pretence of seeing to his comfort, but that was soon cared for, and she stole softly to the chamber of death.

There, on her knees, and again holding that death-cold hand in hers, she renewed her promise, and prayed earnestly for help to fulfil it. Even while she did so, comfort came, for she thought if he were always as kind as he had already seemed, it would

not be hard to love him ; but she felt how much she had to learn ; she knew nothing of his past history, of his present feelings towards that precious mother who had just been taken from her for ever !

One thing only she could and did determine—that it should be her great object in life now, from filial duty as well as affection to the memory of her before her, to sacrifice herself in every way for his happiness.

Time was slipping unconsciously away ; the clock had just warned her that she had already been there more than half-an-hour, and her father was still alone. She arose, bathed her face, to look as calm as possible, and to quiet the throbbing of her temples, (she could not still the violent beating of her heart,) and returned to him. He was just where she had left him, but his face was buried in his hands, which were wet with tears. She entered so quietly that he was not aware of her presence, until she laid her hand on his arm, and said in a tremulous voice, “Father.” He started at the unusual name, and looked up very kindly to her as she stood by him.

It was not a time to talk or ask questions ; she, as many others do, tried to hide all awkwardness by turning mechanically to the table to prepare the tea, which had been brought in during her absence. It was a very silent meal ; when ended, and when they were again alone, he ventured to ask how long her

mother had been ill; but her grief was too new to bear an allusion to it so soon, and a fresh flow of tears prevented from her replying.

He looked at his watch, and said it was very late, advising her to retire at once and try to get the rest which he was sure she much needed; and then she could tell him all to-morrow; adding, "that there is no hurry, my child; promise me that we shall never be parted again, but unitedly carry out those wishes which henceforth shall be equally sacred to us both."

"Oh yes," said she, "I promised *her*, and can never break that word."

We must hasten over the next few days; the trying scenes with which they were fraught, are too common not to be sadly familiar to most people.

Mrs. Thorley was buried in the ground she had so often contemplated from her window; nor were her husband and child the only followers of the cortège. Many of the poor of the village had lost a liberal friend and benefactor, and the number of mourners was increased from Rouen. Amongst them Madame Smith came, and then learnt who Mr. Schroeder really was, and wherefore Mrs. Thorley had been so anxiously looking out for him, to visit her hotel again. It had so happened that he had arrived at Rouen early on the day of his wife's death, and had, unknown to Madame Smith, overheard her giving orders for a carriage to be sent to the village to

bring Mrs. Thorley in to Rouen to dinner. Recent occurrences in London, had made him cognizant of the fact that his wife was still living, and had been, if she were not still, residing at Rouen. It required little persuasion on his part, when the chaise overtook him on the road, on which he had preceded it about half an hour, to induce the driver to let him go to the village in it, and it was thus that he had arrived just in time to hear his wife's last words and receive her dying breath.

He was obliged to go to London again, now on important business; so, retaining the apartments at the village which they were still occupying, he took Annie with him.

They were in town about a month, and in arranging his own monetary affairs, he had to undergo many humiliations and painful scenes, but he shrunk from nothing, spared himself no shame, no disgraceful confession: his one idea now was to make restitution to the memory of her he had rendered so wretched during her life.

On their return to Rouen, they took back an English stone for the grave of her they both mourned. It was plain, neat, and solid, and the inscription was in English.—After the usual statement of her name, and the dates of her birth and death, there was added—"Late, but not too late!"

Annie and her father took a mournful interest in seeing it erected; they had the grave surrounded

with a strong iron railing, and at the head of it, with her own hands, she placed a young larch tree and a small root of ivy, to train up it; both brought from England, and almost daily watered by her tears.

Captain Thorley now made all necessary arrangements to give up his connection with business, so as to lead a retired life with his child, to whom he should strive to pay the debt of affection he owed to her mother.

It was with great sorrow that Annie learnt she was to leave the spot endeared to her by so many stirring events of joy and sorrow; but it was the first sacrifice she could make to the wishes of her father. She felt that the little sequestered village could never be an attractive residence for him, and was too full of melancholy associations; also as he was not anxious to return to England for a permanency, but to make Paris their future home, she felt that it might have been far worse. From Paris she could easily come to visit the sacred little spot, but from England it would have been attended with far greater difficulty. With deep regret therefore, (but which she carefully hid from his observation,) she prepared to quit the scene of joy and bereavement.

They both seemed to hold back any revelations of the past, that were unasked by the other. Annie readily and fully answered any inquiries about her mother, and took advantage of every opportunity to

enlarge upon her virtues, more particularly on her deeply rooted love for her husband; but she felt that it would be unbecoming and indelicate for her to press her father for the information about himself, which he never volunteered.

On reaching Paris they located themselves in the part "par excellence, *le quartier Anglais*." We have too good taste to think of residing in any part of the lovely capital but the Champs Elysées. The gaiety at first bewildered Annie, accustomed as she had lately been to a retired village life; and in fact it was all so changed during the two or three years of her absence that she might almost have fancied it was another place.

She paid a short visit to her "mère française," kind Mme. Rey, who gave her a most warm-hearted reception.

Still her father did not seem settled, and in a very short time after their arrival, she was not much surprised at his proposing that they should travel for a few months, adding that he thought it would be for her advantage, as well as pleasure. She would far rather have remained stationary some where, but she remembered self was to be sacrificed, so she accepted the plea and acquiesced.

They started for Italy; there they travelled from place to place, seeing all that was worthy of note, and finally fixed on Mentone as their winter residence. Annie was thankful it was not Nice, for she still

dreaded the meeting with Reginald again. She had been so continually moving about that some months had elapsed since she had heard from Eversfield.

The winter was a sadly trying one to her; her father's health was evidently giving way, and he became very restless and irritable. How she missed her mother now! Many tears were shed when she thought of that little burial ground now so far away; yet she felt cheered when she realized how conscientiously she was daily and hourly striving to fulfil that mother's wishes towards her father.

As spring advanced he decided on making a tour in Greece and returning to Switzerland towards the end of the summer. She ventured to ask if they should revisit Paris next winter. He was in one of his querulous moods, and sharply told her, he did not know; she was never satisfied but at Paris, and he supposed she was getting tired of being with him, and wanted to go there to be gay and leave him to himself.

We cannot follow them about in all their journeys and changes; they did not go to Paris, but to Biarritz for the next winter; the next year and the next went on in much the same way, poor Annie longing all the time for one hour at Rouen.

At length she seemed to despair of ever going there again: her father always so opposed the least hint at it, that she no longer alluded to it at all. Thus five or six years went by. One day he suddenly

asked her if she had ever visited Scotland; on her replying in the negative, he said, "Well, then, we will go there for this autumn, and return to your charming Paris for the winter."

A severe attack of gout, however, prevented this plan from being put into execution, and as he was evidently getting into a very precarious state of health, Annie urged his going to Paris at once, for medical advice. To that he acceded, but, "only for a short time;" however, an early old age was fast gaining upon him, and it was evident that his travelling days were coming to an end.

As soon as they were comfortably settled in a pleasant apartment, they sent for Dr. Léon, who had been highly recommended to him.

His attendance was destined to be very short: in his second visit he tried to induce his patient to enter into a little general conversation, and as a commencement, remarked, that he was not his first patient of the name of Thorley; in answer to the Captain's inquiries, he said, "a Mrs. Thorley once came to me for advice; she certainly had a fatal disease, but I suspect that a miserable life, and a broken heart, had done most towards shortening her days."

Captain Thorley was in one of his most touchy tempers that day, and in a great passion, declared Dr. Léon knew it was his wife, and that his desertion of her had been the cause of her misery.

In vain did the Doctor strive to convince him that such was not the case, he insisted more angrily than before, that he knew all about it, and had only said it as a further reproach to him !

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHECK MATE.

ANNIE had in vain sought Mme. Rey's old establishment. It was fast being pulled down for some of the recent improvements, and on inquiring, she learnt that she had removed to Auteuil. One day that her father seemed a little better than usual, she went there, and found a handsome new house built, with an inscription over the entrance, "Tribut de reconnaissance." It certainly required explanation, and her surprise and pleasure were very great, on being told, that, owing to some alterations in the neighbourhood of her old residence in the Rue des Batailles, Mme. Rey had been obliged to remove, under circumstances which threatened her with ruin, and that her friends and pupils had come forward and subscribed to purchase for her a piece of land, on which they built her present new home ; an act, we should think, which at present stands unprecedented as an instance of liberality and gratitude, and which reflects equal credit on both parties. Long may she live to enjoy her well deserved distinction !*

* This is a fact.

Miss Thorley was shown into the reception room, and there, engraven on a brass plate, containing the names of the donors, she saw those of some of her former friends ; she regretted being too late to be numbered amongst them, but added an elegant time-piece as her own gift.

Paris has its charms, charms which no other city possesses, and the facility with which residents can enter into society, according to their rank and choice, is not amongst the least of them.

When Captain Thorley's health permitted, he used to accompany Annie to places of public amusement, and private parties. Their afternoons were passed in driving in the Bois de Boulogne, or sitting in the pretty Parc des Monceaux, or the Champs Elysées.

In the latter place Annie made acquaintance with some of the little children, who resort there in such numbers with their Bonnes, and look so fairy-like in their French costumes : her love of children was very great, and being so constantly with her father, caused her to enjoy their interesting chat and amusements ; she found it more refreshing than the society of older people. One little English boy more particularly attracted her attention. He had pretty blue eyes, long fair curls, and was dressed in deep mourning, and always accompanied by a middle aged servant, also dressed in black : at length he regularly sought for Annie, and if she were absent any day, he even reproached her, telling her that she knew he never

cared to talk to any one else. With childish curiosity he had asked her name, and told her his was Alfred Hastings. The servant told her he was in mourning for his mamma, who had been dead about ten months. Captain Thorley seemed much interested in her little acquaintance, and often brought him bonbons or toys.

One day they were sitting in their usual place, when they descried little Alfred running towards them, followed by a gentleman in deep black, evidently his Papa. The child ran up to Annie, and said, "I have brought my Papa to see you;" whereupon the gentleman raised his hat, saying, that he had taken the liberty of introducing himself, to thank them for all their kind attentions to his child. They then fell into pleasant conversation together, which was frequently repeated. Captain Thorley seemed delighted, as the gentleman had visited most of the places he had; and Annie was equally pleased, as it made her father much more cheerful; she often left them together, whilst she went with Alfred to look at some of the entertaining exhibitions abounding in the Champs Elysées.

On one occasion Mr. Hastings reproached her for leaving them so long, and threatened not to bring Alfred with him, if he was to run off with her all the time.

She laughed, and said she considered Alfred as her special acquaintance, and his Papa her father's,

and was very thankful to him for so kindly sitting with him and telling him the news, for that he was a great invalid, and she was no politician ; so that he often said, if it were not for this daily interview, he should not know how the world was going on.

Mr. Hastings bowed, and asked if he might not also have a choice, and not be entirely deprived of the daughter's society, because he discussed politics with her father ?

Annie went with her father to a very large party one evening. The lady who had invited them told Annie she had been trying to induce Sir Reginald Hastings to allow himself to be introduced to her for the next dance, but that he had refused ; he had never danced since his wife's death, and indeed she thought that this was his first appearance at any party ; but, added she, " I find you are already acquainted."

Annie said they knew a gentleman of the name, a widower with a little boy ; it was merely a Champs Elysées acquaintance, probably it was the same, but she was not aware that he had any title or what was his Christian name ; and at the moment a sad recollection passed through her mind of the only other Reginald she had known.

The lady then asked her to come into the music room, where she soon found herself at the piano, a position she filled very well, as she was a good musician, playing and singing with taste and feeling.

As she rose she was accosted by Sir Reginald, and they returned together where Captain Thorley was sitting. Ere they parted the Captain had given him his card, and asked him to favour them with a visit; adding, that he feared he must request him to commence a very unceremonious acquaintance as he was so crippled by rheumatic gout, that, as the winter came on, he should be confined to his house entirely. Sir Reginald, (looking at Annie as he spoke,) said to be acquainted with them on any terms would give him infinite pleasure. Annie curtsied and told him he must be sure to bring her little friend Alfred with him.

“Am I to infer from that, that I shall not be welcome without him, Miss Thorley?”

“Oh dear no,” said she, “any friend of my father’s must be welcome to his daughter.”

Amongst other acquaintance they were introduced to the Count de Rustalle, who was most decidedly attracted by our little English lady. It is well known how desirous Frenchmen are to marry English wives. We must not venture to account for it. Let us accept the compliment de bon cœur and not offend our neighbours by our inquisitiveness. The Count very soon made his wishes and intentions very apparent, we may add, much to Annie’s annoyance. Still he was an acquaintance of her father’s seeking, and beguiled many a dull evening for the invalid; and she

managed very well to keep them amused independently of herself; both were very fond of chess, so that she could pursue her own amusements in the adjoining room. The Count used often to joke her on being so studious, and tried to induce her to join them in some other game, but she always refused it, averring, and with perfect truth, that she did not like any. Once he persuaded her to play and sing whilst they continued their game, but she found check-mate arrived much sooner than on former occasions, and that he was by her side at the piano; she mentally decided that this should not re-occur. He was disagreeable to her in every way; even his French compliments and flattery, (which he evidently thought must be irresistible,) only rendered him worse in her sight: he had been check-mated by the father, and had yet to be so by the daughter, in another game.

He lingered much later than usual that evening, and asked if they were never at home to visitors excepting of an evening. Annie replied that her father rose very late and preferred his afternoons for his papers, &c. "Besides," added she, "would you not have us follow Parisian customs in Paris and receive our friends of an evening!"

He gave one of his French smiles, and said, "Et Mademoiselle?"

"Oh I never go out, excepting very early for a

walk before Papa is up, so as to be with him when he wants me."

"Then, no doubt, I should find you at home about midday if I call; I have a folio of choice drawings I should like to show you by daylight, if I may be permitted that pleasure?"

Annie thanked him politely, and said, if he were to call in the afternoon with them her father could share the pleasure, as he was passionately fond of drawing, and quite a connoisseur in the art.

The Count said he should be much pleased, and if her father could not inspect them then he could leave them; and with the usual endless adieux he left her.

When he was gone Captain Thorley began remarking what a delightful person he was, and how kind he was to come there so much; "but, I dare say," said he, "the crippled old Captain is not the attraction, eh Missie?"

Annie replied that she hoped he was; she said no more, but uncomfortable thoughts were stirred up, and she disliked the Count more than ever in consequence.

"Well," said her Papa, "we shall see, but I think it would be a very nice arrangement, and just fancy my little quiet Annie a Countess."

She begged him not to think of any such improbabilities, nay impossibilities, for that she should

never marry at all — He did not know all her past history, or he would see why she *could* not, and another reason was her promise to her dying mother never to leave him.

Her father would hear nothing of the sort.

The idea of her not marrying on account of anything that might have occurred years ago, was a silly girl's romantic nonsense; and as to not marrying whilst he was living, it was just what he was most anxious she should do, and was the great object of his going into society again: he wished to see her happily and comfortably settled; he would not oblige her to be a Countess if she was so averse to it, but a husband he meant to find for her, and after all she need not leave him, as according to the French custom he could have his apartments under the same roof.

Annie saw it was useless to say any more, and as she did not think it likely that she should be called upon to accept or refuse any one at present, it would be time enough to worry herself about it when she should.

She took her walk as usual the next morning, undisturbed in thought about the conversation of the preceding evening, and returned about eleven o'clock, with some flowers for her father's table. Having placed his chair, footstool, newspapers, and spectacles, all ready for him, she went to the piano.

She had not been seated many minutes ere the door opened and the Count de Rustalle was an-

nounced. She felt excessively annoyed ; her father was particularly unwell that morning, probably from having been kept up later than usual the previous night, and she knew he would not appear before two o'clock.

She received the Count very coolly, regretting that her Papa was not well enough to see him yet ; perhaps he could call again two or three hours later.

The Count made a long speech by which he implied that the fates were in his favour, as it was not the father, but the charming daughter whom he sought, and that he esteemed himself particularly fortunate that they should be undisturbed.

Annie felt very uncomfortable ; a sort of presentiment of something disagreeable overpowered her. She did not even offer him a seat, but said :

"You must be aware, Sir, that I do not receive gentlemen before my father is in the drawing-room, and Mariette is to blame for not having told you so."

"Mariette is not to blame in the least ;" said he, "she refused me admission, and acted as an excellent guard to her enchanting Mistress, but I was so anxious to see you that I told her you had appointed me to call at this hour ; therefore seeing that I was expected, she admitted me."

Annie was horror-struck at his so easily confessing the falsehood and deception of which he had

been guilty, and was more sure than ever that he had some particular object in view. She bent very stiffly, and took a seat, waving her hand for him to do the same; but her whole manner evinced that he had taken a great and unwarrantable liberty, and must have chilled him as she asked; "And pray, Count de Rustalle, what business can you have with me of sufficient importance to justify such conduct."

He hesitated, played with his moustache, looked down at his boots, &c. and, (rare in a Frenchman,) seemed utterly *mal à son aise*, and not knowing what to say. At length he replied:

"I will explain all that to Mademoiselle as soon as she has answered my inquiries as to her own and her father's health."

He had not brought the drawings, so had not even that excuse to fall back upon as a reason for his visit.

Annie thanked him, and said her father was not very well, that late hours did not suit him.

Count de Rustalle made some remarks on his bad health, and at Annie's solitude, which she must find very dull, &c. "Why does not Mademoiselle have a companion of her own age?"

Annie rejoined, "I never feel the want of society. Papa is very indulgent, and takes me out as much as he is able; if I had a companion residing with me it would be a great restraint to him of an evening."

“ You should marry, Mademoiselle, and then he would enjoy the society of his son-in-law.”

“ Oh, no,” said she; “ I am too jealous to allow anybody a share in his affections, or in my attention to him.”

“ Do you never mean to marry whilst your father lives?”

“ I never intend to marry at all.”

“ Oh, you English ladies always say so, but it is only your little ruse to make yourselves more sought after.”

“ I do not think you know enough of the English character to be a competent judge, or you would have learnt that our national honesty would prevent our resorting to such a stratagem.”

“ But if you had a good opportunity, some one of title, and rich, you would change your mind?”

“ It would not influence me in the least; but if you please we will speak of something else; where are the drawings you promised to bring?”

“ Mademoiselle must pardon me, I have forgotten them; and you must also excuse me from changing the conversation yet, as it is the express object of my visit to learn your sentiments on the subject of it,”—he paused. She rose from her seat as if to intimate that the visit was at an end, and said:

“ Then, Count, there remains no more to be said; you know my sentiments.”

“ I cannot go with that answer, Mademoiselle,

pray hear me out ; I cannot believe such sentiments are irrevocable ;—I am come to change them, to offer you my hand, and I feel sure that I may hope to be successful, unless you are fiancée.”

“Count de Rustalle, it is useless ; we English view matrimony in a very different light to the French. We cannot give our hand without our heart.”

“But you do not dislike me ? Your father likes me, and so would you.”

“*Like is not our word for love, Count.*”

“You would learn to love me—if not we could be very happy.”

“I could never be happy with a husband I did not love, even if I could degrade myself so far as to marry him ; and ——”

“And what, Mademoiselle ?”

“Spare me, Count, it is of no use to insist, I beg you to leave me.”

She remained standing, and had drawn away her hand, which the Count had attempted to take.

“Not until I am indeed sure I cannot gain you. Why cannot you marry me without feeling your English love for me ? I *must* have you, what can I say to induce you to change ?”

And in truly French theatrical style he was on his knees, and false tears in his eyes.

Annie saw he was determined to have a further reason, so added, “You know our religion is different.”

He quickly replied : " It should be the same ! I do not care, I will be your religion, ça ne fait rien."

" Worse and worse," said Annie, quite shocked. " What confidence could I ever place in a man who has *no* religion, for such must be the case if you could renounce it for so poor a cause as to please me ; no, I beg you to rise, and I again implore you to desist."

" But surely the sacrifices I offer to make ought to move you."

" Count de Rustalle, I am most grateful to you for any sacrifice you may intend to make, and cannot but feel honoured by your selecting me for your wife, but I cannot refuse you more decidedly than I have done."

" I must ask your Papa, as of course you would not refuse to obey him ?"

" I am thankful to say an English woman is free to accept or refuse whom she wishes ; and my father would never attempt to influence his daughter's choice, and I consider your persistence after all I have said is ungentlemanly as well as unfeeling."

" But," said the persevering Count, " I have one further inducement to offer which Mademoiselle has no doubt forgotten, but which she will not be so blind to her own interest as to reject. Need I remind you that it is not every day you will be asked to become a Countess ?"

Annie was angry and indignant now ; she rang the

bell for the door to be opened, curtsied to the Count, and said: "You had but that one meanness to stoop to, in order to remind me that I am not refusing an English gentleman,"—and left the room.

The Count stamped with rage, muttered something about English pride, and left the house, never to return to it.

Annie said nothing to her father during the afternoon of what had occurred, but when the Count de Rustalle did not appear at his accustomed hour in the evening, she felt that an explanation must come sooner or later, so briefly told her Papa of the honour she had declined.

He was hurt: he evidently had been thinking it would be a charming plan, but he only said: "Well, as you like, my child, but you may refuse the last some day, take care!"

Annie wished the last were come, if she were to have any more. Would she ever change her mind?

She found fresh difficulty now in filling up the void left in their evenings' amusements by the Count's absence. Her father missed him, and blamed her for it.

However, that void was soon to be more pleasantly filled up by Sir Reginald Hastings, who became their almost constant evening guest, and although he was not so amusing as his predecessor, he was really far more entertaining; the evenings often slipped away unawares without having recourse to

the chess board. He was very fond of music, and kept Annie well supplied with all the new operas and songs of the day; which, however, he never brought as a present, but lent them to her during his stay in Paris, as he said he was selecting some for his sister in England, thereby preventing her from feeling uncomfortable at accepting a gift.

Annie never objected to play and sing for him, and he often accompanied her in vocal duets. So true is it that we find what is but an irksome service for one person is a pleasure for another. Wherefore, we will not inquire. Certainly, Annie and Sir Reginald were alike in taste and pursuits, and his attentions, which were of the most unobtrusive and delicate nature, were agreeable to her: in fact, they were for the most part offered through her father, so that she felt no scruple in accepting them through that medium. But we may as well avow that Annie did find Sir Reginald very agreeable in every way, and often in lingering over the name wondered if Reginald Elton was anything like him, confessing that if he were so, her loss was even greater: still she always ended by saying to herself that she could never love another as she had loved him. If she could, we think that the second Reginald had a fair chance of supplanting the first.

It appears that the sentiments of the two parties were also in accordance on this head; at any rate the gentleman was determined to try. He addressed

himself first to the father to learn his opinion of his chances. Captain Thorley could give him no encouragement ; he frankly told him that his daughter had just refused one most desirable offer, and maintained that she never should marry ; still it was possibly the old story ; viz. : that the right gentleman had not yet presented himself.

Sir Reginald decided on asking her, and availed himself of the earliest opportunity to do so.

She refused him decidedly ; but it was couched in very different terms to the Count's rejection. She deeply regretted and was quite pained that he should have thought of such a step. She hoped that nothing in her conduct had misled him to suppose that she anticipated such a proposal ; but that there were more reasons than one which forbid her ever marrying ; at the same time expressing her deep appreciation of his compliment in thinking of her to fill such a responsible post as mother to his little boy in addition to that of his wife.

Sir Reginald, in a manner, accepted the refusal, but delicately hinted at the hope that if she had no objection to him personally she might still be persuaded to change her mind. Should he be too importunate if he wished to hear some of her reasons ?

She said decidedly not ; she considered it due to him ; and the first was she could never leave her father ; she had solemnly promised her dear mother, on her death-bed, that she would not. "That objec-

tion," said Sir Reginald, "could, I think, be easily removed if your father could be persuaded to reside with us. It should be my constant study to render his life happy in every way in my power, and I have reason to think he would not object to me as his son-in-law."

Annie tried to check the emotion which would betray itself, and yet before such a man as Sir Reginald she felt it would meet with all consideration.

He was silent a few moments, but as she did not speak he gently took her hand, and said: "Miss Thorley, I am waiting;—waiting to hear more cogent reasons than that ere I can relinquish the hope that this hand may be mine."

Annie struggled hard with herself to decide what to do. At last she felt convinced that to acknowledge the real impediment would be best.

Sir Reginald was too much a gentleman at heart to take advantage of being entrusted with her sacred secret, and she saw that some insurmountable barrier alone ought to back her refusal.

She stammered something, she scarcely knew what, about a former attachment. He understood her and gave a deep sigh, as if he at once saw the hopelessness of his position; still he made one more effort as his happiness seemed receding from his grasp.

He said: "Miss Thorley, I deeply respect your

reason, and I thank you for having thus honoured me with your confidence ; it must have pained you to do so, but it is buried with me ; I need not tell you no word of it shall ever be breathed by me, not even to your father, but"—and he paused, it seemed intrusive, encroaching, to urge his suit any longer, and yet he could not give it up entirely ; he intimated as much adding :

"Miss Thorley, how seldom do people marry the person who won their first attachment ; if I could but persuade you that I should feel rich in being the second in your heart ; it is not one to wander from its earthly home, and half of it would be more valuable to me than the whole of another's : and after all—I am similarly situated—Death, as you know, has robbed me of my first love——But if, by a life of devotion, I could prove to you that still there is love left, how greatly should I be the gainer ? I feel quite aware of the sacrifice you would make by consenting to be the wife of a widower and the mother of my boy, and I almost shrink from entreating you further, still you little know how my happiness is wrapped up in my success or you would forgive my importunity."

Annie's eyes were filled with tears as she tried to speak, but it was useless.

"I must not agitate you thus," continued he, "and yet even that gives me hope that you are not totally indifferent to me, and only convinces me more

than ever of the value of the heart I am refused. May I hope you will take time to think of it—do not let me take away your final answer now, but leave me at any rate, one ray of hope.”

Annie in a moment roused herself, she knew she dare not let him leave thus, with a deceptive hope, and thereby prolong painful feelings on each side, so she said :—

“ Oh no, no, Sir Reginald, it is quite impossible. Thank you over and over for your feelings towards me, but it never can be.—Let us part, and, if possible, forget all that is past ; but, if I am not asking too much, may I request that my father may not lose his kindest and most agreeable friend through my conduct.”

“ Your too easy request shall be granted on one condition, Miss Thorley.”

Annie looked up inquiringly.

“ Dare I ask a promise on your part ?”

“ Anything,” said Annie, “ which I can consistently grant that may convince you of my respectful esteem for you.”

“ If then the impediments to my wishes are only what you have stated, (and I feel sure you have generously told me all,) will you promise me, if ever you change your mind, that no maidenly reserve, no false shame shall deter you from letting Reginald Hastings know that he may still hope to be made happy ?”

“ Oh, yes,” said she, more overcome than ever,

“but pray do not think more of me. Seek another more worthy of your love and esteem.”

“I shall never make such a useless attempt, therefore, good bye, but only for the present,”—and he gently pressed her hand to his lips, and was gone.

A few days afterwards, Captain Thorley told Annie he had some bad news for her, unless she had already heard it, and that was, that they were going to lose Sir Reginald Hastings: “He came to see me this afternoon, and seemed sadly disappointed that you were not at home; I told him it was a singular thing for you to be out at that time, but that you were gone to Rouen for the day.”

Annie had been to visit her mother's grave, and her favourite resort St. Owen's Church. She was in trouble again, and longed for the scenes of former peace and comfort. Did she regret having refused Sir Reginald? She scarcely knew. Her heart was true to her own Reginald, and yet she had never felt so near liking another. She silenced the doubt by the recollection that she could not leave her father, and that if this were a sacrifice it must be made, in accordance with her promise, which was become her rule of action. It was true that he had proposed the plan which would obviate the necessity of any separation, but she knew that that would only have been removing the sacrifice from the shoulders where duty had placed it, to those who had no right to bear the burden, and only for self-gratification; no, self-denial

was her lot, so she resolutely checked any further thought on the subject.

Captain Thorley added : " I hope, my dear, you have not been instrumental in driving away Sir Reginald as you did our lively Count, or else I shall have to give up all idea of retaining any acquaintance, but crusty, gouty old men like myself."

Annie laughed as well as she could, saying : " I had no notion that Sir Reginald was going away, Papa ; where and when is he going ?"

" Oh, he is off to England to visit his family ; he says his father and mother have never yet seen their little grandson, otherwise I tried to induce him to leave little Alfred with you."

Annie was intently occupied now, arranging the roses she had brought in : which reflected the deepest blushes ?

Her father proceeded to ask about her visit to Rouen, and no more was said about Sir Reginald.

CHAPTER XXV.

CATCHING STRAWS.

AGAIN we leave Captain Thorley, Annie, and Paris, and cross the Channel with our rejected and dejected friend, and we will accompany him on a visit to Eversfield; for Sir Reginald Hastings is the Reginald Elton of former days. Annie did not know him any more than he had recognized the Miss Mills, from whom he had parted some nine years before. No! trouble, anxiety, and sorrow, had altered her, as much as a residence in foreign climes, additional height, a more manly figure, and a profusion of beard, moustache, and whiskers, had changed the beardless boy of twenty; and so they had met, and Annie had been very near falling in love a second time with her first idol, and had refused him because of her changeless love for him! Paradox of paradoxes!

Why were the tell-tale birds and fairies so spiteful as not to interfere in time?

He was soon convinced that "East or west, home is best," although there were necessarily many sad recollections to subdue the joyfulness of the meeting on both sides. There was poor Edith to whose

wedding he was to have come! and there was his own little motherless boy to remind them all that deep, crushing sorrow was not a stranger to his heart.

His wife lay buried with her last infant, at Algiers, where she had first nursed her second child to its grave—a sweet little girl, four years old.

He found many much changed. His father was now becoming the old man, and the little hair that he had left, was white as driven snow.

His little Alfred was the pet of all, but more especially with grandmamma, who candidly avowed her intention of spoiling him.

Of course conversation often wandered back to old times, and amongst other inquiries, he asked what had become of Miss Mills.

Mrs. Elton said, “Ah! what indeed! We have not heard from her for months and months, and I have not an idea where she is. I fear since her mother’s death, she has had anything but an easy life with her father; he keeps moving about from place to place, so that it is almost impossible to keep up a correspondence.”

Sir Reginald remarked, that he did not know she had any parents; he had always understood she was an orphan.

“So she was when she was first with us; but surely we have told you the extraordinary history of her discovering her mother?”

He said he had never heard a word of it.

Mrs. Elton then remembered that it was all made known to them the summer she was with them, before Edith's intending wedding, and as there was so much to tell of, after the noted Missionary meeting, she supposed it was left until they should meet again, which as we know had not taken place—Wilton's death the next year, and then Reginald's own afflictions, had banished all other subjects from their melancholy letters. She briefly told him all. At the name of Thorley, he started.

"Is her father a Captain Henry Thorley?"

"Yes; I have never seen him, but she devotes herself entirely to him; I do not know where they are now; her mother died at Rouen."

The whole truth flashed on Sir Reginald's mind. Then his Miss Thorley was Miss Mills, and no wonder she was gone to Rouen when he called to take leave of her, which at the time had struck him as singular. How extraordinary events were!

"Then," said he, "I know them intimately, and have latterly passed all my evenings with them; her father is a very great invalid, and, as you observed, she has no easy task with him; but how unaccountable that she should not have recognized me; besides, the name ——."

"Well, that is just what I was thinking; but I do not think she has ever been told of your having changed your name—it must now be nearly a year

since I wrote to her, and I was then greatly hurried and wrote a short letter, and merely alluded to your still being abroad, but then, of course I only spoke of you as Reginald; and of more recent events I have no doubt she is ignorant. However, you can furnish me with her address, and I will write to her, I almost wonder she is not married; I suppose you did not hear of any likelihood of it?"

In an assumed nonchalant manner, Sir Reginald said he had heard there had been something about some French Count; in fact her father had told him of it.

"Then is she likely to become my Lady Countess?"

"No, she refused him."

"Dear me! Did her father tell you why?"

"Partly: he said he did not quite know the reason, but he thought there were several. One was his religion; another that she will not marry whilst her father lives; but he says the real one is some former attachment."

"Well, I wonder who that can be; because, although I have heard but little of her for the last four or five years, still, anything so recent as that could scarcely be called a former attachment, and I am sure she had none the last time she was here."

Mrs. Elton wrote as she had said she should do.

“DEAR MISS THORLEY,

“What surprises one has at every turn ! Our Reginald has come home for a few weeks, and has brought his dear little boy with him. You may say, ‘Nothing extraordinary in that,’ but I tell you it is connected with most extraordinary things. I find you have been on the most intimate terms with each other in Paris, unknown to each other ! What could you both have been thinking of ? You must both have been blind. ‘What’s in a name, indeed ?’ why, apparently everything to you two. I can understand your not recognizing him, as I really should scarcely have done so myself. He is indeed altered, poor fellow ! he looks so much older, and then I do not think the additions to his face an improvement, but no doubt with most young ladies, you do. And then, when I am surprised at his not knowing you again, he simply says, how should he ? You were only eighteen when he saw you last, looking very delicate, but are now robust, and (must I be so rude as to tell you ? he would not forgive me for it), looking more than thirty ; then you, like himself, have changed your name, and have found a father. His dear little Alfred is a great favourite, and I am doing all in my power to persuade him to leave the child with us, but I believe it would break his heart to do so. And now I must tell you, grandmamma is a little bit jealous ; yes, of *you*. I tried to coax the dear child into wishing to remain here, and he

answered me very plainly, ‘that he would rather go back to Paris, because Miss Thorley is there!’ I suppose when they do return you will resume your acquaintance on the old footing. I must now explain to you about the change in his name. I scarcely wonder that you did not recollect it, for I do not think you ever heard his poor wife spoken of but as Cousin Florence; but her name was Hastings, and when her rich uncle died, he left all his money and the fine old Park to them, on condition of their taking the name, and with it the title, which, with the estate will go to their boy, now, as you know, his only child. Shortly after the uncle’s death, the little girl, which they had called Edith, died of a fever prevailing at Algiers; Florence had no sooner lost her than she was taken ill of the same; she got over it, but was left in such a weakened state that in about six weeks she died, after giving birth prematurely, to a little boy, which only survived her a few hours. We sadly want Reginald to return to England permanently, and reside at Coniston Park, but at present he will not hear of it. He says when Ella is old enough to be his housekeeper, and little Alfred old enough for a tutor, he may think about it, but that until then it may remain in the same tenant’s hands who has had it since the uncle’s death.

“We are all much as usual. Dearest Edith is invaluable in the parish and at home; she is the sunbeam and the olive branch amongst all. We

could not spare her, otherwise she would have been a treasure to Reginald. I often wonder how we should have got on without her, but had she married we should have not known her value as we do now. Ella grows up a nice girl, and cannot but benefit by daily intercourse with such a sister. Charles is about to marry—the old tale of the junior partner marrying the senior's daughter! Alfred is Captain, and gaining laurels in New Zealand. He says he shall have Ella for his housekeeper when he retires as a comfortable old bachelor, and therefore desires all eligible gentlemen are to be kept out of the way, but what are we to do?—we are growing suspicious in the quarter of our present curate! We shall be delighted to have a long letter, as Reginald, of course, can tell us very little that we want to know about you, as you were *strangers* to each other. Are French Counts fascinating? You see I have had a little hint!—take my advice, and have a good English husband!

“ Our united kindest regards,

“ Yours, ——”

Imagine Annie! Then she had absolutely refused her own Reginald! Yet all was for the best as it was. Yes, her own dear mother had told her to strive to think so, and she did even now. Had she known it, how much more painful would it have been to reject her own happiness only because her pro-

mised devotion to her father would have forbidden her to grasp it! Now, the original idol was fast rescating itself on the throne of her heart. If she loved Reginald Elton, she was ready to adore him in Sir Reginald Hastings; but it must be kept back. At any rate we know that she no longer wished she might never see Reginald again.

Many circumstances about that time concurred to open her father's eyes to the daily sacrifices she was making for his happiness, and he began to appreciate her accordingly. His manner towards her became much softened and more affectionate. He would often urge her to go out more, and join parties of pleasure, but she always refused, insisting that she did not care for such things, and was as happy as possible.

He asked her one day how she managed always to appear so cheerful and contented.

"Oh," she said, "I catch the straws that blow past."

He looked at her and said, "What an original girl you are; what can you mean?"

She laughed, and said "she was not sure that she could tell; at least, she knew exactly what she meant herself, but was not sure that she could make him understand."

"Come, come," said he, "I am not such a stupid old man as all that."

"Oh no, dear Papa, but I fear I am too stupid to

explain my own ideas. I think pleasures are like straws, blown across every one's path, you know, it is an ill wind that blows no one any good. Some of the straws have the grain left in the ear, and some are only chaff; so I catch them all as they pass, I throw the empty ones back for the wind to carry on to those who can content themselves with empty pleasures, but those laden with grain, I keep; they are the solid enjoyments with which I build my rick of blessings, from which to draw supplies in future."

Captain Thorley said he understood her perfectly, and he also understood that he had a good little daughter, who was a great blessing to him.

It was almost the first time that he had ever expressed himself so affectionately, and Annie was so gratified, that she ran up to him to kiss him; he put his hand fondly on her head, and said, "I do not care to lose my little blessing yet, but I should like to know that some good husband would value her when I shall be gone."

"Papa, it is all in God's hands, and whatever He will do, we are quite sure will be for the best."

Then, thought Captain Thorley, my little lady is changing her mind; she does not say as usual that she will never marry. Some chance for Sir Reginald yet! I wonder what is the meaning of that—oh woman, woman!

A month soon rolled away, and the end of it brought back Sir Reginald. Somehow, Annie had

never brought herself to tell her father of her letter from Eversfield, or of the discovery of her old friend in their new acquaintance; so that the scene which ensued at the first meeting was amusing, awkward, painful, and attended with results.

Sir Reginald was not long in coming to call on the Captain, and brought Alfred with him to see Annie.

He shook hands, inquiring with due politeness for the father's health, then, turning to Annie, said, "And Miss *Mills*, how are you? What an extraordinary lady you are, to have carried on your little game so quietly, and I must say it is not very complimentary to your recollections of Reginald Elton, if he had so completely passed from your memory."

Annie tried to smile; she knew she ought to say something, and that her father must find all this very strange; but she stood trembling, and blushing deeper and deeper, like a person taken in some very guilty act; but not one word would come.

Her father looked, (as well he might look), like a person completely puzzled. He saw, or thought he saw, something wrong, but had no present clue as to where the error was.

Sir Reginald finding Annie was quite beyond speaking, turned to him, and said:

"Of course, Captain Thorley, your daughter has told you, that by going to England, I have discovered that we are old friends, and I really think you should reprimand her very severely for having forgotten me;

for myself, I can only reproach her, and deeply regret it; "and yet," said he turning to Annie, "perhaps I might have less reason to regret it, had I been fortunate enough to have left an indelible impression; others could not then have done so, and I should soon have been reinstated where I would give worlds to be." This was said quite *à part*, so that her father did not hear it.

Poor Annie felt that matters were getting worse and worse, so, without one word, hurried out of the room, to the excessive amazement of her father. Sir Reginald did not appear so much astonished as might have been expected under such circumstances; Captain Thorley remarked, "What an extraordinary child that is, but cannot you enlighten me, Sir Reginald?"

On his part he merely said, that on going to England he had learnt from his mother that Miss Thorley was an old acquaintance; that, in fact, from some cause which doubtless Captain Thorley knew well, she had been Governess to his sisters when she was very young, but as she then called herself Miss Mills, and as he was then Reginald Elton, they had somehow failed to recognize each other; but no doubt Miss Thorley would make it all clearer to her father than he could do; he then took his leave, saying he would return as usual in the evening, if agreeable, and thinking, that, as there appeared from his mother's remarks and Annie's present embarrassment, some family mysteries, he had better feign ignorance of all about it.

When Annie returned to the drawing room, her father asked her for the explanation of all this unaccountable proceeding; of course, naturally inferring that all their past history was now known to Sir Reginald.

Annie replied, "I think not, Papa, inasmuch as they do not know it all at Eversfield, only as much as was necessary to account for my appearing amongst them under a new name."

Captain Thorley looked relieved, but then told Annie that he should like her to give him a really consecutive history of her past life, for hitherto he had only learnt incidents here and there, in such a disjointed manner, as to leave him in the dark about a great deal, and more especially as to her connection with the Eversfield family. It was a wet afternoon, and they should therefore be undisturbed by visitors, so she might as well entertain him with it now.

Annie acceded without hesitation.

At the end of her interesting account, (which the many questions and remarks of her father had lengthened until just dinner time), he remarked:

"My child has a brave little heart, and deserving, oh how deserving, of a better father."

He held out his hand to her, and said in a trembling voice,

"Annie, your unworthy father asks you to continue the forgiveness of him which your mother began."

Annie kissed his hand over and over, but said nothing. Here was the second time she had been asked to forgive a parent ! Her father probably took her kisses as tokens of pardon for he did not ask her again, but pressed her to him, saying—"Oh the blessing that I have lost all these years, and how were those awful years past ? My God, can'st thou forgive ?"

They sat still in each other's embrace some time, then he said.

"But my Annie has not confessed all."

"Yes, Papa, I think I have told all that has happened to me !"

"No, my darling ; who is that one who stole my child's heart so that she can love no other ?"

Annie hung down her head, and whispered : "My father cannot wish to know a secret that was too sacred to be divulged to my mother ; you must, dearest father, excuse me from telling that—I must keep my one secret—more now than ever."

"Annie, your mother probably had not the same reason for knowing you had one that I have had—you would have told her if she had. Let us make a little contract about it—Would you not like to know all my past life ?"

Annie did not know ; she felt sadly certain that there was much in it of which she had better remain ignorant ; and yet much also that she would give a great deal to know. She replied in the affirmative,

feeling that it would appear very strange for her not to evince any interest in her own father's early life.

"Then," said he, "you shall know all, yes, *all*, Annie—I, too, have secrets, fearful secrets, yet I should be better satisfied that you should learn all from myself; I have sometimes thought you should know nothing of it until after my death; and, with that idea I have passed many of my unoccupied hours in writing it out, but I think you are entitled to it before; but I must exact a promise."

Annie feared what was coming, and was not long left in doubt.

"First, you must promise me not to despise or desert me, richly as I should deserve both." Annie said, "Father, I could not if I would, and I would not if I could. You forget that my promise to my dear mother was unconditional, and if not, I am quite certain she would never have made the condition subservient to her child's opinion of her father. She thought you faultless, and, therefore, could not have imagined such a condition."

"Your inestimable mother viewed me through a glass that reflected on me her own perfections.—But now for my second condition, and Annie, I do lay great stress on it. I have a sort of presentiment that my own, and perhaps your happiness is much bound up in my knowing this secret—promise me, therefore, that you will tell it to me after you

have read my history—I shall require it as a proof that I am forgiven by you.”

“Father, I would really rather not read your life. Leave it until—until the time for which you first intended it.”

“No, my darling, it had better be now, or it would make me miserable to receive any of your kind attentions when the last comes; but you must also tell me what I am so anxious to know, for the reasons I give you.”

Annie was silent; she felt as if almost more than her life was being asked of her.

He said, “I do not ask it now, but when you know all my secret history, then without a promise, I feel sure you will tell it to me, or must I feel unpardoned by my forgiving wife’s child?”

No more could be said. The servant came in to say that dinner was served, Annie went to it utterly unhappy, feeling herself now as much bound as though the solemn promise had been extorted. She could not refuse to read her father’s history, and yet by doing so she tacitly agreed to tell her own secret. And *he* was to come in the evening, and she dared not absent herself; they were to keep up the old friendship as if nothing particular had occurred between them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER PROMISE.

SIR Reginald came as he had promised : Annie was very quiet ; her Papa did not appear so well as usual, and the visitor left early. Next morning whilst she was preparing breakfast, the servant brought her a small parcel, with a message that as Captain Thorley did not feel very well, he should not rise yet, and did not wish to see her before he came into the drawing room, but that the parcel would occupy her attention for the morning.

Annie knew, in a moment what it contained. She laid it down whilst she finished her breakfast, rang and had the things cleared away, and then with a deep, sad sigh, sank into the easy chair with the parcel in her hand. She opened it very slowly, very despondingly. Female curiosity was, for once overpowered by stronger feelings. A scrap of paper fell out, on which her father had written, "I shall not get up so early as usual to-day, so I shall expect my Annie to devote her morning to the perusal of this,

and to respond to my wishes regarding the conditions when we next meet."

Annie wrung her hands in anguish at what was before her. It was no longer a matter of choice ; her father demanded it of her as an act of obedience, and, in accordance with her mother's dying wishes, and her own promise, she must deny herself in every way, and grant that obedience. She was not, as we know, of a character to be satisfied with half-performed duty. It was not the letter, but the spirit of her mother's wishes which she felt herself bound to obey. Her heart rose in silent prayer to her Heavenly Father to grant her strength to obey the earthly father whom he had placed over her. She felt it hard—when she thought how that father had unscrupulously, cruelly forsaken her in her infancy, she felt it hard, and was almost disposed to question the duty of obedience to such a parent ; but her tender conscience immediately upbraided her for such sophistry. She knew too well that there is no reservation in the commandment : Children are not told to obey such parents only as fulfil their duty, and responsibilities towards them. The child must answer for his or her obedience to the parent, however unworthy that parent may appear, and really is ; just in the same way that the father or mother must answer for the full and conscientious performance of his or her duty towards the child, however wilful and ungratefully disobedient that child may

prove : each must stand or fall according to the fulfilment of his own duty.

She sat thinking for some time. More than once she rose from her seat, resolved to go to her father, return him the manuscript, and beg of him to release her from her painful position ; but she sank back again on the chair as she remembered the determined character of that unrelenting father. She had learnt that character now, from her own observation, besides what her mother had told her of him. Also the note accompanying the papers was too dictatorial in its expressions to allow of a doubt as to her father's decision in this instance. His *expectation* as therein expressed, was to the full, a stringent *command* which she felt that she dared not disobey.

Sadly then, did she set herself to the solitary, unpleasant task of perusing the past life of that parent, who, with all his recent kindness and love, was now, from some inexplicable motive, exhibiting an arbitrariness almost amounting to tyranny.

* * * * *

The perusal was interrupted many times by bitter thoughts, and still more bitter tears. *This* was her father ! the husband of her idolized mother ;—confessedly, by his own history of himself, for about twenty-five years, one of the most unprincipled, dissipated, heartless, infamous characters on record. Stopping at no sin or crime ; drinking, gambling, cheating, bigamy, anything that indulged the evil

propensities of his idol, self! Now, she felt thankful to the all-wise disposer of events for the very afflictions of her devoted mother. What a twenty-five years of misery had she been spared, by the very course of events which she had looked upon as the cause of all her misery!

And did the child's heart revolt from such a parent? We could not blame her if it had, but never for one moment did she suffer any feeling of rebellion to arise. Her principles of religion and right feeling were too strongly rooted, to be easily shaken. Despite all, he was still her father. What his life had been—well, she did not know him then, he was not that character now: she was to close her eyes firmly to the past; it was the father of the present time that she had promised her mother to love, and never to leave. She was sorry, oh! so sorry, that her father had insisted on her reading the sad, sinful history of his past career; but it should pass from her mind, as though she had never read it. She sat with the manuscript in her lap, thinking, thinking,—now of her dear, dear mother, then of her erring father. Such eventful lives, and yet so different in their startling events; one life, the record of unhappiness, misery, broken-heartedness—the other of selfishness, crime, shame—both equally painful to contemplate; on and on, thought carried her even to the scenes of the past, but time staid not for her, and she was startled out of her reverie, by the time-piece striking two. Her father must soon

come down, and how to receive him? How would he, *could* he, look on her, now that she knew all? And then her naturally kind heart was weighed down with sorrow, for the shame her father must feel before his own child. Yes, her duty now was even to help him to bear the load of remorse, which must be overwhelming him. She instinctively felt that he would scarcely venture to face her again. Time still went on, and he did not appear. She determined on going to knock gently at his door, and ask if he were ready to come down. Poor child! she was hastening her own fate; but she was so utterly unselfish, that, strange to say, she had not thought of the consequences of her first meeting with him. She had been so engrossed, first by the perusal of the manuscript, then by shame for such a father, and then by pity and sorrow for him; that her own painful position had not once recurred to her mind.

She knocked, and he immediately told her to enter.

He was sitting with his back towards the door, his face buried in his hands, the silent picture of misery; nor did he raise his eyes, until she had repeatedly caressed and fondled him, begging him to come downstairs to lunch.

He then groaned, and said, "Oh, my child, my child, why did you come to seek me? Why not have gone away and left me uncared for, as I have been uncaring towards others?"

"My father, come with me; I will not have you

“speak in that way. Leave you! Why, if I had ever intended to do so, should I have left it until now, now when you want me more than ever? And where would then be my promise to her, whose memory is so dear to both of us, vex me not, dear father, by ever again hinting at such a thing. Come away now to the other room, and—and—let the past twenty-four hours be as though they had never been!”

Had she any lingering hope that her father would consent to this oblivion wholly? We think not: her own part of the contract was so far from her mind now, that her whole attention was absorbed in her father's mental suffering. If it were so, disappointment was following fast upon the footsteps of hope.

Her father hastily swallowed some brandy and water, which was on the table at his side, then turning towards her, said:

“No, my child, those hours can never be obliterated from our memory. Memory is a tyrant, and arbitrary in the sway of her power; we cannot remember or forget as we list. Let us stay here quiet, and refuse ourselves to any visitors this morning, and then talk out our subject; and, if you like, after to-day we will refer to it no more.”

“Oh, father, pray do not. It can be of no possible benefit to either of us, and is far too painful for us to discuss impartially, or indeed, in any way.

Indeed, I cannot imagine any advantage which can accrue to either of us from it. Do oblige me, and let the subject be dropped, locked up with those miserable papers, for ever."

"Then, Annie, promise me one thing."

In a moment the full light broke in on poor Annie's mind, regarding her own position. Her father was now going to extract some other promise from her, and no doubt it would be in connection with that one, which he had already considered his own. She gave a start, as from some sudden pain, and burst into tears, exclaiming, "No, father, no, pray ask no more promises—I cannot,"—she had almost said *will* not obey, but as she checked herself, he calmly said :

"My love, I am not at all referring to that one, which I hope and intend to have fulfilled this morning ; but simply, one regarding those papers. I wish you to promise me never to destroy them."

Annie had already thought how wise it would be to burn them, and so let the secrets of her father's life die unknown to any one but herself. She merely asked, why not ?

"Because you may possibly meet with people, who knew me during those twenty-five years, those *sinful* years, and on learning what a devoted daughter you have been, they may choose to doubt the sincerity of your affection, and insinuate, that had you known what I had been, even the money which I

shall be able to leave you, would not have purchased such disinterested devotion. You will then have it in your power to contradict such an assertion; and here is a memorandum which I wish you to keep with the manuscript, in which I solemnly declare that you were totally unaware of my circumstances until after you had read that, and again protested your determination never to leave me. Therefore, as I wish in case of such an event, to do full justice to the disinterestedness and affection of my little blessing, she must just give me this promise."

Annie promised, adding that she could see no necessity for such precautions, as it could never concern other people to know why she had been attentive and kind to her own and only parent; in fact, it would appear to all most natural that she should be so.

"You may think so, my dear, but I know one person who will doubtless try to hunt you up, if he hears of my death, and that I have left an unmarried daughter. He would be base enough to work on your feelings of justice and honesty in retaining money which he would make you believe would have been his had you forsaken me, as he will surely think you would have done if aware of my history."

He paused, and Annie feared what might be coming, so immediately proposed that the luncheon should be brought in, adding, although against her own convictions, "And then, Papa, we may just as

well go down to the drawing-room, and see any one who may call ; it will cheer you up, and we have no more to talk about."

" Yes, my dear, we have much more yet to settle. I have many times lately felt that my health is failing so fast, that probably I shall not long be here, and I wish, and ought to leave you well informed on everything connected with my monetary affairs and my will, and also we *must* discuss the *one* point in your own history."

The lunch arrived, but not a bit could Annie swallow. Every mouthful threatened to choke her, and she almost wished that it would. She kept gulping large draughts of water to drown down the tears which would rise, and yet it appeared to her that her father finished his lunch in an unaccountably short time. He rang for it to be removed ; had he asked Annie to do so, she could not, it would have been like tolling her own knell.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVENGE.

IN a few minutes they were once more alone. Captain Thorley drew his chair opposite the fire, and told Annie to do the same.

“Now, my dear, I want to give you some information which I might have done at a much earlier period—in fact, ever since we have been reunited; nor can I exactly account for the feeling which has withheld me from doing so—I fear something of the old selfishness under a new disguise—a sort of wish that I should feel that your love to me was spontaneous, either for myself or through obedience to your dear mother’s wishes—or, may be from both; at any rate from a purer motive than the love of money. I believe I have never denied you anything you have wished, but we have lived in such a retired manner, that, if you have ever given my circumstances a thought at all, you can only have supposed that I have a very limited income; and your own wants, either from that cause, or from a naturally contented mind, have been so few and moderate, that I have easily satisfied them without your having to suppose

that I was a Cræsus in order to do so. All this I have done with the settled intention that you should not expect that I could leave you any property : consequently no one can question the purity of my child's motives in nursing her cross old father. But now, as I said before, I have too sure reasons for knowing that my days are numbered, and I wish, whilst my mind is still clear, to explain all to you. I hinted that a person may seek you out as soon as my death is known to him. You have read somewhat about him this morning, but only under the initials of J. C. I feel it incumbent upon me, in order to warn you against him, to tell you a little more of his character than was necessary in that paper. He is a heartless villain, and took advantage of me when I was little, if any, better than himself. His name is James Clarke, and it was his cousin, Fanny Clarke, to whom, as you have read, I was on the point of being married, although I was aware I had a wife living. Poor unfortunate Fanny ! some latent spark of conscience saved her from the disgrace, but hastened her end. To think she was so attached to me has saddened my whole life more than anything else. I imagined, (as I am sure most men do, or they could not so ruthlessly win and throw away the true affection of a confiding girl,) I imagined that she would soon forget me and marry another, but I had tried to deceive myself. The morning after I had divulged to her that I was a

married man—the morning which was to have seen her my wife, as you already know, saw her literally the “bride of death.” She was found dressed in her bridal attire, lying stretched on the ground, still in death : on the table was the glass which had contained the fatal poison, in her hand a likeness of me, a lock of my hair, and, by a strange coincidence, my pocket-handkerchief and pocket book ! All looked as though I had been with her that morning. Clarke knew I had been the previous evening, after all the family party had dispersed for the night. Her bedroom window opened to the ground ; I had watched her to her room, and then went round by the garden to her window, and remained talking to her for some time, making my awful confession. She took it so calmly that I was almost disappointed, thinking, that after all she had not loved me so much as I imagined : but few know how a strong-minded woman can hide her real feelings. As I left her room, and went through the garden, I fancied I saw a cigar thrown down near one of the trees. I listened, but heard no one, so went away, and left Algiers that night. The next morning I was soon reminded that her avenger, in one sense, was found. Her cousin, James Clarke, had traced me, and as I was taking a cup of coffee for my breakfast, my door opened, and he stood before me. He easily recognised me, in spite of my having disguised myself. He looked at me with a gaze full of hatred, jealousy,

and vengeance, which made me quail. "Now, Schroeder, you are in my hands!" I uttered no word, and he sat down opposite me, and remained silent for what seemed to me interminable minutes. At last he spoke: "It is reported all over Algiers that you have murdered Fanny—she is dead! and circumstantial evidence is strong against you. You were sent for immediately the fact was discovered, and it was found you had left; *you*, who were to have stood at the altar with her this morning, and no one can assign any reason for your flight otherwise than the murder; no one knew of any quarrel between you; but this morning she is found *dead, poisoned, your* likeness and hair in her hand, *your* pocket-book and handkerchief on the floor; footsteps are traced from the window across the garden to *your* house, and on arriving there *you* are not to be found. Proofs enough to bring any man in guilty; it was a stolen nocturnal visit, for what reason? no one knows—all supposed you had left when the party broke up—you took leave of her with others—and yet here are proofs, certain and sure, that you must have gone round to her room—and—Schroeder, here am *I*, to swear that *I* saw you! It was *I* who stood behind a tree, and threw down my cigar as you passed—I, too, had been watching for a midnight interview with Fanny. I was goaded on to jealousy—I have loved her madly for a longer time than you have known her, and was going to have my revenge on both of

you then, by frightening her into compliance with my wicked purposes. Now, the cards are dealt, make your game! Either purchase my silence, or take the consequences."

Here was my sin and its consequences, all coming upon me at once! I felt stunned. I was, as he said, completely in his power; and he had arranged his cards too well, for he knew that, by a happy speculation, I had just realized a large sum of money, and by that same speculation he was worse than bankrupt. I knew him to be a worse villain than myself, so had no chance with him; or I think that (feeling convinced as I did of my own innocence of the death of Fanny,) I should have risked the trial. He had watched us from the garden, and would swear to any inventions to avenge himself on one who had succeeded in winning Fanny's love, when he had failed. He had in fact driven the poor girl to commit suicide; he told me that as soon as I left, he went to her window, and told her that he had witnessed my going to her room, and leaving it again by stealth at that unseemly hour; that her character was now in his hands, and that unless she would then admit him with less pure intentions than I had visited her, he would proclaim her disgrace to every one. I need not say how indignantly she repulsed him, and immediately rushing to the bell, rang it violently. The act took him so much by surprise, that he merely hissed out in his rage and disappointment, "*then*

remember" and ran off. No more was known until the next morning. I suppose she was so overpowered by the anticipation of what he would say, and which from my unaccountable absence from the wedding, would have appeared still more probable, that she took the poison. The servant said that when the bell rang, she ran immediately to the young lady's room, and found her apparently suffering intensely from some cause, and as she said it was toothache, and did not remove her handkerchief from her face, but ordered her to fetch the bottle of laudanum from her father's dressing room, she did so, and at her desire left her. That infamous Clarke's proposal now was, that I should make over all this money to him, or take the consequences of his denouncing me as the murderer, and the perpetrator of any other black crime which the case would justify him in laying to my charge. I stoutly refused for some time, and dared him to do his worst; but at length I thought his silence would be best purchased, so we entered into a compromise. I was to give him £5000 down, to release him from present difficulties, and to make a will such as you will find at my death. By that will, in case of my never finding my wife and child, or that they repudiated me, he is to be heir to all. After these events I made money fast, and as my little blessing has not cast me off, she will be heiress to a large amount; but I am certain that this man will endeavour to find you out, and strive

to prove that I have told you of my wealth from the first, and that therefore your conscience must assure you that it was the golden link which bound you to me, or that you would have forsaken me, and so the money would have been his by the terms of our agreement : or else he will make a show of generosity by offering to take you with it. Therefore it is, that I wish the manuscript and the other memorandum preserved, and I have provided a witness to the truth of the assertion contained in it ; and therefore also is it, that I am so anxious to know my child's secret. I think it probable that pecuniary obstacles have been in the way of my darling's being united to the object of her faithful attachment ; if so, here it is removed ! and also, I am especially anxious to see you united, or at any rate engaged to one who can assert his right to take your part against this man. Now, my child, your father you see has good reasons for his request, you cannot but acknowledge that."

Annie could not but acknowledge it, nor did she wish to do so. This father, who had at times appeared so severe, so exacting, had all the time been watching over and studying her interests. In his way, had he also been fulfilling her mother's dying injunction ; he had been taking care of her, and thus had he been trying to compensate for his former neglect of his wife.

A flood of affectionate gratitude poured in upon her soul. How could she longer refuse to accede to

his first and only request? and yet, how confess her secret?—either alternative puzzled her equally—but she felt and knew in her heart to which she must surrender. However, with a little remainder of maidenly reserve, she determined that it should be dragged from her more by inference, than by positive avowal; she could never bring herself to name him.

After a little pause, her Papa opened the attack.

“Am I correct in supposing that he is not in circumstances to take a wife?”

He—then here it was coming, and she would certainly have to give in, to surrender *à discrétion*, and confess who this *he* was.

“Oh no, Papa—he is very rich.”

“Rich! then why the deuce doesn’t he marry you?”

There, thought she, if Papa begins like that, we shall never get on. I will not have him sworn about.

“How can *I* tell, Papa?”

“How can *you* tell? I like that—who should know I wonder if *you* don’t!”

“Well,—perhaps he does,” said Annie, with a somewhat amused smile.

“*Perhaps he* does!—well I suppose so, Miss Saucy—but he should have let you know, too.”

“I don’t see why, Papa!”

“Not see why! well then you must be a little simpleton. Just fancy a man wishing to marry a girl, but never letting her know why he can’t.”

Annie looked very confused—*he* was getting blamed for what was not his fault, and with a woman's generosity towards one she loves, she would not suffer that. She stammered out—

“Papa!—he never said he wished to marry me.”

“Why, Annie, what can you mean? Did he never make you an offer? never ask you to love him?”

Poor Annie!—she had said too much now to be able to recede; she blushed crimson, and in a very faltering voice said, “No, Papa!”

“What can you mean, child?”

“Papa—I cannot confess it—let us forget all about it.”

“No such thing. I'll know all now—it is most extraordinary—so out with it.”

Annie hung down her head—twisted her fingers together sufficiently to dislocate their joints, and let the tears drop slowly and heavily on them—but was still silent.

“Do you mean to say that you loved a man who did not love you or even ask you to love him?”—A pause, but no answer—he continued, “But no, I cannot believe that—any man who was enough with you for that *must* have loved you or he was a fool.”

Poor Annie could not but hear the compliment, and at any other time would have laughed at her Papa's politeness, but now she gave no word of reply. Her father scarcely knew how to proceed.

“Is he married to any one else?”

“Papa, he was not to blame—if I was foolish, perhaps wrong—it was not his fault—I could not help it, and I did not know he was engaged at the time—and he, of course, never had a suspicion that I—that I—liked him : but, as I have told you, I can never love another, so,” (and she made a faint attempt at a smile,) “so Mr. James Clarke will have no chance. I shall be as safe as you can wish, as safe as if I were engaged to be married ; so—so really let us say no more of it.”

“Nothing of the sort?—I do not release you until I know all about it ; as you say it is of no consequence now, so you may as well enlighten me at once. When was it ? Have you seen him since ?”

“Oh, it was long, *long* ago, when I was *very* young,” said Annie, as if she were an octogenarian at the very least.

“Poor old lady !” said her Papa, laughing, “I wonder, if it was so very long ago, that you have not had time to forget it ; but answer my other question. Have you seen him since ?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, ho ! you are determined to give me plenty of trouble to find it out.—One would think you were accustomed to a cross-examination, so I must proceed accordingly : Is he married ? and do I know him ?”

“Not now.” Annie gave but one answer, it might apply to either question ; how she wished her Papa would take it for the latter inquiry ; but he said,

"Not now what? not married now, or that I don't know him now?"

"He is not married now," quietly answered Annie.

"Do I know him?"

Annie felt that this question would settle the affair. She was worried, and harassed, and burst into tears.

Her father was vexed at her discomfiture, but convinced that there was nothing left to disclose.

He said, "You need not answer any more, my dear. Not now married; then he *has* been. Well, there is only one way to settle that, so I shall sum up the evidence, and answer my last inquiry myself, rich—a widower—you have seen him since—probably lately?—humph—as the children say at 'hide and seek,' I am beginning to get hot; or I suppose we are playing at twenty questions." He said this purposely to give her a little time to recover herself, for more than suspicion was dawning on his mind. Annie saw this, and fairly cried out, "Oh Papa, Papa, indeed you must promise me——"

"Promise you what?—pray what promises does a father confessor make to his fair penitent?"

"Oh Papa, don't laugh at me, but promise me that you will never tell it to any one,"—and she appeared in such genuine distress that her Papa immediately suspended his joking, and drawing her close to him, said :

“I promise you, my darling, solemnly, that as long as I live I will never breathe a word of it to any one—no not,” (and again he smiled mischievously)—“not to Sir Reginald Hastings, who is a rich widower whom my little girl knew long, oh *so* long ago—and yet it does vex and perplex me also—because, Miss Sly-boots, although *you* never thought proper to tell me of it, I know that *he* made you an offer not so *very* long ago, and that you refused him!—Now how can you account for that?—A young lady refusing the very man she loved *so* long ago!”

“Because at the time I refused him, Papa, I— we had not found each other out, you know.”

“No, nor I don’t believe you have now, and yet it is a pity, a great pity—I wish I had not promised now—”

“Oh, but Papa—you *have* promised, remember!”

“You need not be alarmed, my dear—I shall strictly keep such a solemn promise, but as I said, I am very sorry to have made it—but *he* will find you out yet—and *I hope* he will.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SECRET'S A SECRET, WHEN KNOWN BUT TO ONE !

Now *the secret* was divulged, or rather, discovered, Captain Thorley rightly judged that, having gained his object he must not annoy his daughter by further reference to the subject, either now or at any future time. He kissed her affectionately, saying, "Then our contract is fulfilled, my darling ;" and she ran off to hide and think over her annoyance, her almost shame, in the privacy of her own room.

When they met again at the dinner-table both felt an awkward restraint at first, but it soon wore off.

The next thing to be dreaded was Sir Reginald's evening visit under the surveillance of her father's watchful, and now enlightened eyes ; but fate is not always spiteful, and circumstances were about to occur which would make that pass off better than she anticipated.

It was a lovely bright evening, and he arrived rather earlier than usual, but not alone !

He brought Alfred with him, and also a visitor, whom it surprised Annie much to see.

His sister Ella almost pushed past him to greet her favourite Governess. Annie's look of intense delight was worth anything.

Sir Reginald then explained that he had induced his mother to *lend* Ella to him for three months, having persuaded her that a visit to Paris would improve his sister in every way; and he had not named it before her arrival, wishing to give Miss Thorley a little surprise.

Captain Thorley was more pleased than he dared express: his mind quickly ran on to the future: Annie and Ella would, of course, be constantly together, and that would naturally and almost of necessity involve more intimate intercourse with Sir Reginald; and then——and then——what might not happen? They passed a very happy evening, and, as he left, Sir Reginald said, "Now, Miss Thorley, I must in great part make over my charge to your kind attentions; I hope your father will spare you as much as possible to accompany Ella in her rambles about Paris, for there is much for you to see yet, and it will be a great advantage to her to benefit by your taste and general information; my carriage will always be at your command."

"As much as ever you wish, Sir Reginald," quietly responded Captain Thorley: "I shall be very pleased and thankful that Annie should see every-

thing ; she confines herself a great deal too much at home, and although I fully appreciate her kindness in so doing, I can easily spare her."

Annie turned to Ella to tell *her* how pleased she should be, and to express her hope that she would bring her work, and spend much time with her, "For you know we cannot always be walking and driving about, and it will be such a pleasant change to Papa to have you to talk to him."

They left, and she feared her father might say something which would refer to the subject in connection with this strange coincidence, but he respected his child's wish for secrecy too much to do so ; he had given his word never to allude to it again, and from that word he would never swerve.

Immediately after breakfast next morning she was summoned to her father's room. In a moment she was in a flutter of fear and astonishment, but without knowing wherefore. After the usual morning salutations, he gave her a note which had just arrived and required an answer. It was from Sir Reginald, saying that his sister would call about two o'clock, and he hoped that Miss Thorley would join them in a drive in the Bois de Boulogne.

Spring was fast advancing ; it was a lovely day and Paris was looking perfection ; Annie could not imagine anything more delightful than a drive in Sir Reginald's luxurious looking barouche, and exclaimed with almost childish glee, "Oh, Papa, how

delicious ! and such a day as this ! how I wish that you could come !”

“Thank you, my pet, but as I cannot, do not let that thought in any way mar your enjoyment : I shall be very happy at home thinking how you are enjoying your drive and the society of your old friends”—he said this without any *double entendre*, but it, nevertheless, brought the rose and lily together in Annie’s cheek : he continued, “If you are not very much engaged this morning I want to appropriate some of your time. If my little Annie is going out with Sir Reginald and his sister, I should wish her to make a suitable appearance ; so tell your maid to dress herself and accompany you to buy yourself a new bonnet and mantle, &c. &c.”

Annie protested against it as quite unnecessary, but her father insisted, adding, “Now that you know I have money, I choose you to make an appearance more in accordance with the fact ; and your plain costume, which suited our supposed small means, would look strange in Sir Reginald’s elegant carriage : If you do not go at once and make a good selection, I shall be obliged to send for the things here and purchase them myself, and I am quite sure my choice would not suit your taste, as I know nothing about such things. Just ring the bell ; I should think that Merrick is returned by this time, from an errand I sent him to execute.”

The old servant answered the bell, and handed his master some papers.

“Very well, then Annie you go and get on your bonnet, whilst I settle with Merrick.”

On her return to the room, her father showed her plans of the French and Italian Opera-houses, and in each he pointed out a small box, just holding four persons, which he had taken for three months: he said, “You will take the tickets to Sir Reginald with my kind regards, and tell him that I beg that whilst he is in Paris, he will make use of my boxes for you all: do not tell him that I have only just engaged them; and as Alfred is not old enough to go often, there will be a spare place for any friend he may like to invite. Now, run off, and get the most bewitching little Paris bonnet that you can see: at the same time you must choose yourself some dresses more suited to such gay scenes than any you have.”

He put a cheque for a thousand francs into her hand. Annie stared! She had never had so much in her possession at once.

“But Papa, dear Papa, I cannot spend all, or half of this!”

“That does not signify to me, my dear; I have heard every one say how expensive dress is in Paris, so no doubt you will not have much to spare. In future I shall give you £25. a quarter, so you may do what you please with it, but get everything good;

there are no dearer bargains than cheap articles of dress."

"I thought you knew nothing about such matters, Papa," said she laughing, and having kissed him, she set out on her agreeable expedition; for she liked pretty, tasty apparel, as well as any one else, and was not displeased to find that she might indulge in it, without any seeming extravagance.

We will not follow them during three months of sight-seeing in Paris. Although very enjoyable, it is very fatiguing in reality, what then would it be in imagination? Every one who knows Paris, is aware that it was a constant succession of delight, pleasure, and admiration.

Of the two persons who interest us most, we cannot say much. If they loved each other before, further intercourse was not in either case likely to diminish the feeling. Still nothing happened to remove the veil which hid the reality from Sir Reginald's discovery. Annie knew he loved her, but he did not know that she loved him; nor could she bring herself to give him any hint or clue to that effect. How happy would that have rendered him, and for the matter of that, her also, if it had been found out through some of those little accidents which sometimes bring such *dénouements* to light:—but the more she thought of it, the more watchful was she over herself, and more reserved than ever.

Thus the time rolled on, and Ella was to return to Eversfield, and her brother was to accompany her for a time. Coniston Park required some personal attention, as his tenant was acting in a manner not to give perfect satisfaction, and the affair called for investigation on the spot.

The utter loneliness of Annie's position after their departure, sunk into her heart. The days passed by heavily ; so monotonous in their heaviness. Her father saw, and knew, and felt for her in it all, but could do little towards ameliorating the state of affairs ; and he was rapidly becoming more of an invalid, so that they could see no society now. Sir Reginald would have been admitted of an evening as of old, if he had been in Paris ; but there was no one with whom they were sufficiently intimate, to ask them to fill the vacant place, and Captain Thorley was too ill now to seek a substitute.

He was gradually, but surely sinking ; Annie saw the end approaching. It was like watching an autumn sunset : the light receding, and the shade advancing, and she shuddered, as she looked forward to the darkness and winter, which must come, and leave her alone in the cold world when he was gone. She might make friends, truly, but not for a long time ; she was too retiring and reserved to do so at any time, therefore, could not by any possibility, when enveloped in the cloud of sorrow which was coming upon her. " Oh, Reginald, Reginald," she

cried in a sort of agony of mind, "If you did but know."

And why did he not know? She had given him her word, that if she ever changed her mind, she would let him know it; and in consequence of that, he had, with a gentleman's right feeling, refrained from importuning her.

About six long weeks were gone since he had left Paris, when her father was taken suddenly ill with a severe attack of bronchitis. If the disease could not be checked at once, his worn out frame precluded all hope of his rallying, and she was alone with this fresh grief. Not only going to lose her father, but to be all alone at such a moment!

He got rapidly worse, and hope was gone; she was alone in the drawing-room, lying on the sofa in the dark, when she heard a well known step on the stairs. The door opened, and Sir Reginald stood before her.

She was so taken by surprise, that for a moment her reserve was gone; she sprang forward, exclaiming, "Oh, I *am* so glad to see you," and then sank back on the sofa, weeping beyond all control. She was so worn out with nursing and watchful nights, and oppressed by her feeling of miserable solitude, that Sir Reginald's appearance at that moment was welcomed as though he had been her brother.

He took no immediate notice of her joy or distress, but sat down by her side, and taking her hand in his,

said in his kind voice, "And I am *very* glad I am come—how is he now?"

Annie replied that she feared a very few hours were all that she could hope for now. "But how did you know he is ill?"

"Because, ere I left, I foresaw that such an event was likely to happen, and made him promise to send for me: I could not bear that you should be alone at such a trying time: I hope you are not vexed with me for being here?"

"Oh, no! but *so* obliged!"

"Would you rather have Ella, because if so my mother said I was to send for her?"

"No, thank you:"—the words were few, but said in a tone that convinced Sir Reginald that he was the right one, and it made him happy.

He arose to go to the sick room as an excuse to leave Annie alone for a short time, for he saw that her feelings were so excited that a short calm would restore her more than anything he could say.

He found Captain Thorley much worse than he expected—the laboured breathing showed that it was more a question of minutes than hours. The medical attendant told him that the end was very near, but that he had persuaded Miss Thorley to leave the room for an hour, as her father's sufferings were too trying for her to witness. Sir Reginald intimated that he thought she would prefer being there, and was turning to fetch her, but the patient shook his head,

and motioned for Sir Reginald to come close to him. He seemed very pleased to see him there, but could not speak. He made signs for Merrick to bring his desk, and to Sir Reginald to open it, and take out a packet of papers directed to himself; but even as he did so the last struggle seemed approaching; each breath was more difficult than the last.

Sir Reginald took his hand, and said, "Anything about this?" pointing to the papers.

"No—my will—take care of Annie—" he could say no more. Annie was at the door, she could stay away no longer: she came to the bedside, and stooped forward to kiss his forehead. He faintly whispered, "My Blessing," and breathed his last.

After an interval of a few minutes Sir Reginald led her from the room. He took her back to the sofa in the drawing-room, and sat holding her hand for some time; but her grief seemed to increase so much as to alarm him. He attempted to rise to ring the bell, but she drew him back; he resumed his seat by her side, and drew her head down to rest on his shoulder; she did not resist. At that moment she forgot that he was anything else than her only friend in her solitude and grief.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHO HAS A FRIEND'S CLAIM

BUT a short time could elapse before the funeral. Sir Reginald undertook all the arrangements, and watched over every opportunity of saving Annie any unnecessary thought or care connected with the sad event. She told him that she wished her father to be interred at Rouen by the side of her dear mother. He had died on a Tuesday, consequently must be buried or removed for burial on the Thursday ; so on the evening of that day his body was carried away by the night train ; Sir Reginald, Annie, the English clergyman, and medical man, Merrick, and Annie's maid, Adèle, followed by the early train next morning. It was as privately managed as possible. The grave had been reopened without permanently injuring the larch or ivy ; and, surrounded by the little band of mourners, the corpse was lowered, in that sleep of death which at length united those who had been so sadly parted in life.

The clergyman, doctor, and Merrick returned at once to Paris ; Sir Reginald took Annie to a quiet apartment at the Hôtel Albion, where he left her under the care of her maid, whilst he returned to

the cemetery to see the grave filled in and put as neat as possible, and gave orders for the additional inscription on the stone.

In the afternoon they performed their silent return to Paris. On reaching her desolate home Annie naturally gave way again to her unrestrained grief, and at Sir Reginald's entreaty retired to the quiet of her own room at once, and reappeared no more that evening. Sir Reginald remained until very late. As he was leaving, Merrick asked him if Miss Thorley intended to see any visitors the next day, as several had called, and one gentleman appeared particularly anxious to see her : he did not leave his name, but said he was Captain Thorley's oldest friend.

Sir Reginald said he would answer him in the morning, when he knew Miss Thorley's wishes on the subject.

He came back very early the next morning, and sent up a note and a letter, with his message of inquiry after her health.

Poor Annie had had but little rest, still nature had partially succumbed to the great strain on her nerves and strength for the last fortnight or three weeks. But she had passed much of the night in sad thoughts of recent occurrences, and in more sad anticipations of the future—the very necessity of doing so bewildered her—she could not remain where she was, living alone ; if she were to return to England, whither should she go ? She had plenty of money,

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and no doubt could purchase a home, but it would possess none of the endearing qualities of that cherished word. So she tumbled and tossed about, worn out with the harassing subject until the morning, when she fell into a fitful, feverish sleep. She awoke with a start, fancying it was late, and that her father would be missing her; alas! it was she would miss her father. "Alone, alone!" she sobbed, and buried her face in the pillow, which she deluged with her tears.

It was late, but she had been some time awake when her maid came to her door, and knocked very softly for fear of disturbing her. On hearing her voice Adèle went in and delivered Sir Reginald's message as to her health and rest, and whether she intended to come down.

Annie gave the answers, adding that she should soon be down, but begged he would not wait breakfast.

Adèle added, "And if you please, Miss, if you said you should come down, I was to give you this note, and wait for an answer."

Sir Reginald had written Merrick's inquiry, but added an entreaty that she would not be visible to any one just yet. She however wrote a little answer, in which she said she would see no one but her dear father's old friend. Adèle took the note, and then giving her mistress the letter left the room.

Annie saw that the letter was in Mrs. Elton's

handwriting, but did not remark that it had no stamp, but feeling sure that she knew nothing of her present grief, she laid it down unopened, and turned round to think again. That occupation seemed to bring no satisfaction, so after a time she opened the letter. It might make her feel a little less lonely to read her kind friend's letter.

She was mistaken. The letter had been written before Reginald left home to return so hastily to Paris, but from what he had told his mother of Captain Thorley's sinking health, and from the manner in which the summons to Paris was expressed she felt little doubt of the result of the illness. She therefore wrote this letter, putting no date to it, and charged Sir Reginald to deliver it after Captain Thorley's death, or if he should recover, to destroy it.

It was such a letter as every one who knew Mrs. Elton would have expected her to write; full of Christian consolation, and tender sympathy, and ending with the wish that Annie should come to England under the escort of Reginald, who was obliged to return immediately. She added, "I hope you do not feel this as an invitation, but as my natural expectation of your first movement, and that you had already and spontaneously intended to come here. No one else can be so glad to endeavour to comfort you, and I trust that you will not give any more recent acquaintance the preference; here will

be your home until you can make more desirable or more comfortable arrangements."

Every cloud has a silver lining, and here was true comfort; and it succeeded in softening Annie's poignant sorrow at once. The sharp misery of thinking of what she must do next, was at any rate postponed, and that was a great relief which she gratefully acknowledged as emanating from the Source of all consolation.

She dressed herself and descended to the drawing room, where she found Sir Reginald waiting for her. He had not breakfasted, and upon her expressing her regret that he had not done so, he told her he never could take his meals alone, and consequently, as he had left Alfred at Eversfield, he had been obliged to wait for her. He inquired again how she had passed the night; she answered truthfully, that her plans for the future had succeeded sad thoughts of the past, in such a manner as to keep her awake, "but," added she, with a sweet, grateful smile, "I should indeed be ungrateful if I did not feel better for the letter you sent me," handing it to him to read.

They discussed their plans and arrangements for the journey, during their breakfast.

It was decided that Sir Reginald must return to England without delay, and that Annie could not go quite immediately, as she had many things requiring attention ere she could leave Paris. She should like

to get a good place for Merrick, who had been a most trustworthy, devoted servant to them for many years; her own maid she should retain. Ere leaving France, she should wish to pay a last visit to Rouen, in order to see that all was finished there; also to take leave of some of her kindest Paris friends, and to spend a day at Auteuil with Madame Rey.

Sir Reginald said: "As to Merrick, if he would like it, I should be glad to engage him as my own servant,—I am fully aware of his faithfulness, and he is just such a person as I require to superintend everything at Coniston Park during my absence. I suppose I must decide on residing there, but no doubt shall often play truant—Alfred must go to school, and the solitude of that grand place would have no charms for me"—he paused, and then as if roused by some brighter thought, and looking at Annie, he continued, "however, I may not be always doomed to such a fate—suppose then that I go to England to-morrow, and send Ella back to keep you company; do you think a fortnight will suffice for all you wish to accomplish here? because I could manage very well to meet you at Rouen about then, and take you both back to Eversfield."

"Yes, the arrangement as far as I am concerned would suit me exactly, but I need not trouble you to come for me; Merrick and Adèle would be with me, and I should not like to consent to Ella's

coming: it would be very dull for her just now—I could offer her no amusement, and must attend to my own affairs, which would not interest her, and unless she accompanied me she would have to remain at home alone.”

“ Yes, yes,—say no more about that, I am quite sure my mother will not hear of your being left alone, and for the present it would be far better for Ella to be with you than myself—you know Adèle is a very steady respectable person, and could take her out when you do not want her. I will write to mother to-day, for Charles, (who is now at home,) to bring her across to Boulogne, if you will send one of your servants to meet her there, and bring her on.”

Annie tried to thank him, but could not say much—words fail us strangely at times of sorrow as of joy.

An awkward little silence ensued; neither knew exactly what to say next, when Merrick opened the door, and announced the gentleman who had called yesterday, and whom Miss Thorley said she would see.

He entered; a tall rather good looking man, but with an unpleasing expression, which marred his countenance.

Annie rose as he entered, and slightly bowing offered him a seat.

Sir Reginald arose also, and half proposed to Miss Thorley that he should leave for the present.

The visitor watched both parties with a peculiar suspicion in his look, which did not escape Sir Reginald's keen observation.

Annie begged Sir Reginald not to go :

"This gentleman is a perfect stranger to me, but as the old friend of my—" she could not say *father*, so stammered—"I wished to see him, but please stay with us, for I cannot tell him about it." Of course meaning her father's illness and death, about which she naturally imagined the old friend was come to inquire.

Sir Reginald resumed his seat, and took up "*La Patrie*," which Merrick had laid on the table at the same time that he announced the visitor.

Annie was very nervous, looked extremely pale and worn, but her new deep mourning rendered her sad look still more interesting.

The stranger looked at her for some little time, and then seemed to bethink himself of the reason of his visit. He asked many questions about her father's late illness and previous state of health, saying that he had not seen his friend for many years, and indeed had almost lost sight of him; it was by the merest chance that he had now heard of what had happened: he was passing through Paris, and was stopping for a week at the English boarding house close by, when he heard of it, and had hastened to offer his services in any way that they could be made available by his friend's daughter: he found

he was rather late, still he hoped there might still be something in which he could be of use, and evince his affectionate regard for his friend; could Miss Thorley point out any opportunity.

Annie had answered all the first part of his inquiries in monosyllables, and in sentences, broken and rendered almost inarticulate by her sobs; for his offers of service she thanked him, but she was going to leave Paris as soon as possible, and had nothing left now to do in which she could avail herself of his kindness.

“May I inquire where you are going, Miss Thorley?”

“To visit some very kind friends in England, until I can decide on my future plans.”

“You will not I hope consider me impertinent Miss Thorley, but I am your father’s oldest friend, and am most anxious to serve his daughter—do not think me prying or indelicate if I inquire if your father’s pecuniary affairs are left in a comfortable state for his daughter; he was of a very speculative turn, and may have been unfortunate, whereas I have been particularly lucky lately, and should be most happy to render any assistance. I trust you would consider my purse as your own, for your excellent father and I always shared our gainings and losings, in fact we were partners in everything.”

During this lengthy and ostentatious speech, Annie’s colour came and went by rapid changes; she

felt annoyed, yet scarcely knew why, and she was so long in replying that Sir Reginald looked up and observed :

“I am in possession of Captain Thorley’s will, Sir, and Miss Thorley is left provided with ample means to supply her wishes and requirements in the manner to which she has been accustomed.”

“Oh, I am delighted to hear it ; and of course the will is duly signed and valid in every way?”

Sir Reginald now began to get annoyed, and replied somewhat haughtily, “I don’t see in what way that can concern you, Sir, such inquiries are inquisitive and impertinent.”

“Oh ! some lawyer I suppose, or near relative of Miss Thorley ?” bowing to Sir Reginald as he spoke.

“Neither one nor the other, Sir, there is my card ; I have been on most intimate terms with Captain Thorley for the last two years, and knew Miss Thorley nine or ten years before that.”

“Indeed ! then, perhaps, you may have heard something of me, and my reason for inquiring about that will, as I am deeply interested in it ; my name is James Clarke !”

Annie uttered a little shriek, which convinced Clarke that *she* knew something of him, but Sir Reginald was more guarded, and coolly remarked, “You are unknown to me, Sir, and I do not see in what way you can be concerned in Captain Thorley’s

will—your name appears in it, but then his property is so unquestionably his daughter's, that were you a relative, the circumstances which render it hers, would be equally a subject of indifference to any one else."

"Not at all, Sir, as you must know, by the terms of that will, that under certain circumstances I may be the heir to the property, and it is to inquire into those circumstances that I am here, nor will I be thwarted in my intentions by any one."

Sir Reginald arose, and addressing Annie, said, "I think, Miss Thorley, we had better be left to discuss this unpleasant affair alone, it may be painful to you."

Annie thanked him, and was rising to depart, when Clarke stepped forward to prevent her.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Thorley, it was with you, and not with your friends, that I came to discuss the subject, and unless this gentleman can assert some greater right than mere friendship, thus to control your actions, I must request, on the contrary, that *he* will leave us to ourselves. He has informed me that he is neither relative nor legal friend, I therefore dispute his right to be present at all, much less to interfere. I see you know who I am, and I demand a private interview, and I will consent that my claims shall stand or fall by your conscientious decision."

Annie turned very pale, trembled and leant on the table for support, but spoke firmly :

“Sir, I have a right at any rate to grant you a private interview or not, as I please, and to select any friend I wish to be present,—I am not afraid of anything connected with my private affairs becoming known to another, such may not be the case with you; I therefore request, (if he will oblige me,) that Sir Reginald Hastings will remain in the room; but if I may further have a choice, I should feel very grateful to him to hear all you have to say, during my absence, and if necessary I will return to give my *conscientious* decision, as you are pleased to term it; but I beg also to add, that, as I know all the circumstances attending your claim, you have nothing to hope for in any way.”

She was again moving to leave, but Clarke lost all command of his temper, and exclaimed: “Madam, I refuse the interference of this gentleman, unless he can prove an unquestionable right to it.”

Annie shook from very fear; she knew that he had no further claim or right!

A deep blush suffused Sir Reginald's face, as he stepped forward, placed Annie's hand within his arm to lead her from the room, and proudly said, “That right is mine, Sir! This lady will I trust, in the course of a few months, honour me with the name of her husband!”

As he said this, he had managed adroitly to draw Annie towards the door, so that her confusion was hidden from Clarke, and it was well he did so, for

she was so overpowered, that it required all his support to convey her to the adjoining room ; he placed her in the chair her father had so often occupied, rang for Adèle, put a letter into her hand, saying, “ that is my title,” and retired.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WILL.

SIR Reginald returned to the visitor, whose temper did not appear to have cooled down at all, for he immediately opened the attack with :

“ I consider that you have taken a most mean advantage, Sir. My intentions towards Miss Thorley were perfectly honourable. That money is mine, undoubtedly mine, but as no doubt her father had won her affection and assiduous attentions by promising it to her, I felt that it would be hard for the poor girl to lose all at once ; and as I am getting on in years, and I suppose ought to have a wife to nurse and attend to me when I am an old man, I intended to marry her and make her a liberal allowance.”

“ Your intentions towards Miss Thorley really are most liberal, almost too flattering,” sarcastically observed Sir Reginald, “ I am thankful that she has left the room before you declared them ; it would have been too overpowering for her in her present agitated state. However, you and I have other business demanding our present notice, and we must endeavour to forget all else for the moment. If, after

we shall have duly discussed the business part of the affair, you should still feel disposed to express your intentions to Miss Thorley, (and of course I have no word to say against it,) and, if even she should be inclined to listen favourably to your proposals, I promise you that I will relinquish my claim—I cannot make a fairer offer,”—but a smile curling the corners of Sir Reginald’s mouth, would have betrayed his feeling of security to any other observer; as it was, Clarke scarcely looked at him; he bit his lips and listened with a mind shaken by various doubts—What could Sir Reginald mean? Did he know so much of the business as to feel safe? Had he during those two years of intimacy gained any undue influence over Captain Thorley? Perhaps so: perhaps he had been won over to falsehood and perjury, on consideration of having the fortune, and *that* on condition of marrying the daughter. Or he might have talked Thorley over to make another will; convincing him that the other, with its attendant oaths, was extorted under peculiar circumstances, which could not have rendered it binding. The old saying that we judge others by ourselves, was true in this instance. Clarke was vile enough for any mean action, why should not this Sir Reginald Hastings be the same? As he thought of it, it appeared beyond a probability that Sir Reginald did not really care for Miss Thorley, and would be thankful to be *obliged* to relinquish his claim. Be it so! of course he would require money

—very well ! If he liked to give up the girl and half the fortune, Clarke would leave him the other half. All these ideas danced through his brain, in far less time than it has taken to write it.

Sir Reginald had a packet of papers in his hand, and taking a chair near the table, invited Clarke to do the same.

“Now, Mr. Clarke, as I said, I am not a lawyer, but I have given you a satisfactory reason for my interest and interference in Miss Thorley’s affairs. First, I wish you to state your claims to this property, that I may know what I have to acknowledge or refuse, as the case may be.”

“I should wish to see the will first,” said Clarke.

“By no means—in the first place you have intimated that you know its purport ; in the next place, I refuse to have it touched until I *know* that you have a right to do so.”

“Sir, I have as much, and I suspect, more right to that property than Miss Thorley has. As you must be aware, Captain Thorley had deserted his wife and child ; and, up to the time that he and I parted in Algiers, and when that will was made he knew nothing of them. He committed an act which would have brought upon him the severest penalty of the law had not I assisted him to clear himself, or rather, to escape—it was then, from gratitude, that he wished to present me with £50,000 which he had realized in some fortunate cotton speculations. I

refused—I am not of that grasping, ungenerous disposition that would take advantage of a friend in distress—but he was so determined to give me tangible proofs of his gratitude, that to quiet his conscientious scruples, I consented to the arrangements made in that will. I reminded him that no doubt his wife and child were living, perhaps in want. No, said he, I have provided for them. Well, then, I said I would take it on condition that he should use his utmost endeavours to seek them out; and then, if they cast him off, as he said they surely would, I should at his death inherit the money. Further, he bound me by a solemn oath to make personal inquiries the moment I should hear of his death; we drew up the will and parted.”

And Clarke drew himself up as if sure of Sir Reginald’s unbounded admiration for such disinterested conduct; but instead of any such thing he beheld an expression of the deepest contempt and disgust on Sir Reginald’s face.

“If I understand you right, Sir, then your claims to this money rest on Captain Thorley’s wife and daughter having repudiated him, and I must inform you that utter disappointment awaits you.”

“Oh, but, Sir Reginald, the *motives*, Sir! Miss Thorley is, I hope, I presume, an honourable young lady, and she is to give me her word of honour that her motives in devoting herself to her father were purely disinterested; that no coercion, no misrepres-

sensation has been resorted to—that she was fully informed of her father’s previous dissipated, wicked character—a disgrace to any virtuous daughter—that in spite of *all she chose* to live with him as his daughter;—further, that she was not, at the time of her choice, aware of this fortune, as of course that would naturally purchase the devotion of any young woman. I speak chiefly of Miss Thorley, as I believe Mrs. Thorley died without ever seeing her husband again after their first separation.”

“ I will reply to your last remark first, Mr. Clarke. You are misinformed; so far from being likely to have repudiated her husband, Mrs. Thorley never slackened her efforts to find him: she had made every possible inquiry from the first, with that hope, and resided at Rouen for the last few years of her life, because she had learnt from a friend in London that he had been seen and recognised there, but under disguise of person and name: she immediately came there, waiting many anxious months without hearing anything more of him, when, in a most extraordinary manner she found her child, whom Thorley had taken from her when he left her. She died at Rouen of a most painful and lingering illness, but just at the very moment of her departure, her husband reappeared. She then made her daughter solemnly promise never to leave her father, but to love him and show him a child’s affection for her sake, if from no other motive—so that I think you must be con-

vinced that his wife would not have forsaken him."

"Well," said Clarke, in an irritated manner, "but the daughter, the daughter, Sir Reginald! The wife is dead, but the daughter? she is living, and *why* was she so devoted to him? not only through obedience to her mother, I doubt?"

"Certainly not, but from a higher motive; her filial duty, which next, or rather as part of her duty to her God, urged her on to it, until at length affection seemed to fix itself as a further and more agreeable incentive. Her father then determined on the bold step of trying that affection, by forcing upon her the history of his past life in all its blackness and shame. Still she did not swerve, but seemed moved by pity and sorrow for him; so that you see *she* has never deserted him."

"But, still, she probably knew of the money which was in store for her?"

"Not at all. Until the last six months Captain Thorley had limited his style of living to what she would have supposed in accordance with his pension and a very small income besides; but after she had again and so decidedly declared that nothing on earth should separate her from her father, (to all of which I was privy, although she does not yet know that I was informed of a word of it,) he told her of the different state of affairs; although she has no idea of the amount of the sum coming to her. I

was the witness of all these transactions, and have recorded my solemn oath that I knew she had the account of his life to read on the day named in one of these memoranda, and that she made the decision ere knowing of the rich consequences."

Clarke looked furious and crestfallen. Sir Reginald handed him the papers bearing the dates and names as asserted, adding :

"I presume, Mr. Clarke, that you are now convinced that you cannot substantiate any claim to the money?"

"I presume, Sir," said the maddened Clarke, "that it is all a rascally plan to do me out of my own ; but, still, I will not spare Miss Thorley. I will hear her acknowledge it all, and I suppose you will not object to my trying any innocent little stratagem whereby to prove whether her heart will not come to me with this money."

"I have no objection at all, so far as I am concerned, Mr. Clarke, nor do I at all doubt the issue, but I think it would be an act of ungentlemanly and wanton cruelty just now :—however, before we submit her to the test, I think I may convince you still further of the futility of the experiment, and thus save her this unnecessary pain."

"Oh, as you please ; but mind, I have her promise that I shall stand or fall by her conscientious decision ; and also your own promise to relinquish your claim to her if I can succeed in getting her into the golden net."

"Most undoubtedly, Mr. Clarke, but before calling her in, I have one or two more things to propose for your consideration. As regards the will itself—I presume you have a copy of it?"

"Certainly I have, and, in fact, it is a duplicate as safe as the other, for as Thorley might have lost or destroyed the other, I thought we would be provided with two—"

"Very well, then, you no doubt must be aware that that will is perfectly valueless!"

"What?" almost roared Clarke; "it is an infamous lie, Sir—I tell you so to your face!"

Sir Reginald did not take the slightest notice of this language, but occupied himself in detaching the will from the other papers, and spreading it open, remarked:

"Of course, you are aware that a will, to be valid, must be signed by the testator and *two* witnesses at the same time, and dated at that time. Now, you will observe, here is Captain Thorley's signature to this will, with only *one* witness, namely, yourself—consequently, the will is not worth the paper on which it is written."

Clarke turned livid with rage, but could not utter a word. He got up to seize his hat, and to rush from the room, but Sir Reginald would not permit it yet, he said:

"You *shall* now hear the rest. Your villany you see defeated your own ends. *Two* witnesses to such

a deed would have been quite one too many for your nefarious purpose, and could not easily have been found at a way-side inn some miles from Algiers. Ere you go you must look at Captain Thorley's valid will—as soon as I saw the other I discovered its defects—singular enough it had never struck her father: but, as he said, the will and its attendant circumstances was such a compilation of wickedness that he had never opened it since it was written; he then made another, properly drawn up, signed, dated, and witnessed by Merrick and Adèle, the two servants; I am left sole executor, and his daughter sole heiress—so that the old will, had it been ever so correct, would have fallen to the ground before this fresh one. You see you cannot put in any claim to the money; as for trying the further experiment of winning a claim to Miss Thorley's hand, I have no objection to your trying any *innocent little* stratagem, but her heart, I have lately learnt on too sure evidence, has been mine these twelve years!——Do you wish to see her?"

"Let me go, let me go!" raved Clarke, whereas no one prevented him, but he did not observe that Sir Reginald opened the door, and he bolted from the house in a perfect fury of rage and disappointment.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DEATH THE REVEALER OF SECRETS.

HAVING thus dismissed Mr. Clarke with, we imagine, a fully satisfactory, if not an agreeable result to his visit of claims, we must return to our astonished Annie.

She sat some moments perfectly immoveable; Adèle had appeared and been dismissed by a sign, no word did Annie speak; there she sat; not an image of despair certainly, nor yet of delight.—She was too puzzled to know what to think or to feel.

Was she, after all, in a dream? What had he just said? What could he mean?

She knew she was not dreaming—high words reaching her ear from the next room told her that much, and she knew those voices.

But what had one of those voices last said of her? Why that in a few months she was going to call him her husband! It was impossible! what *could* he mean? She had said, and done nothing to make him imagine that she wavered from the first refusal;

she was *sure* of that; she had been very careful, she could not forgive herself had she been guilty of such forwardness; but no, her conscience was perfectly clear on that point.—Then what could he mean? and so she went on without getting any answer to her self-torturing questions. She could not even think; her mind was all in a labyrinth from which there was no outlets. No, Annie, not until the guide brings the master-key. And she remained in a delicious sort of reverie, picturing to herself how happy things might have been if—ah! those *ifs* that stop so many plans.

She, at last and suddenly remembered he had given her a letter.—Where was it—slidden unheeded to the floor! and what had he said when he gave her the letter? Something about its being his title! Oh dear, oh dear, what could it all mean?

In a perfect tremor of curiosity she picked up the letter. It was her dear father's well known writing, and here again she paused; for a few moments grief mastered curiosity, she could not see a word beyond "Dear Sir Reginald"—and her eyes filled with tears. She wept sadly for a few moments, then calmed herself and read:

"DEAR SIR REGINALD,

"Faint heart ne'er won fair lady," and in my younger days men used not to think much of a first refusal. I am not an idle spectator of what goes on around me, and unless I had watched you narrowly,

and seen that your wish to marry my child arose from sincere attachment to her, for her own worth, (and believe me that is not small, for a better girl never breathed,) and also from my observations of your own character and disposition, that I feel convinced that you are the man, and I firmly believe the *only* man ever to render my 'blessing' as happy as she deserves to be,—I never would have broken the ice which bound me to secrecy. I am not breaking my promise to her now, but how many times have I regretted having made it? I extorted the unwilling confession from her only under the promise that as *long as I lived* I would never betray her.—But I have beaten my little prude this time! I shall not be living when you read this, but shall have a satisfaction when I reflect on my death-bed that my decease will render the two dearest to me happy for their lives. Take her, Sir Reginald, for she is yours; her heart has been yours since you first knew each other as Annie Mills and Reginald Elton; and I know, indeed *we* know, how faithful she has been to you. She refused the Count, and she refused yourself, for yourself—I was sure at the time that she was very near wavering from her love of Elton for her admiration of Hastings. Never was a harder task than getting her secret from her! In fact she never said your name: I had to do that after discovering by inference who it was.—I am so thankful that I succeeded at last. Now I shall die

happy about her;—you will protect my darling from James Clarke whenever he may appear, and I feel certain that he will do so ere long; and I know that my child will soon be united to the man she has loved so many years, and whom I should have selected above all others as the most deserving to be entrusted with such a treasure. Take her! and that God may bless you both is the dying prayer of,

“Your truly attached old friend,

“HENRY THORLEY.”

Annie laid down the letter, buried her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed, “Oh, my father, my own dear father.”

An arm was put round her, her face was drawn to a shoulder, and she heard a sweet whisper in her ear, “I was once dear Reginald, am I not now to be your *own* dear Reginald?”—and removing her handkerchief and imprisoning her hands, he held her tearful face up to his own. She did not speak—her heart was so full and he did not require an answer; he now knew all—he continued speaking: “Oh Annie, how happy this has made me! but indeed you have been very cruel with your hard reserve,—why could you not have given me a little hint—ever so little—and I should not have been dull to understand it?”

“I?” and then she burst into tears, as if horror-struck at feeling anything like happiness just yet.

Sir Reginald left her for a few minutes, whilst he

fetches the papers, which, in his haste to see Annie after Clarke's departure, he had left open on the table, when he returned she was more composed; and instead of alluding to the happy subject again directly, he gave her a little time by talking about the termination of Mr. Clarke's hopes, expectations, and visit; he then tied up the papers and took his hat to leave her, saying that he would be back to lunch with her, and in the meantime should go to his hotel to write to Eversfield; asking if she would like to enclose a note in his envelope; he was sure his mother would be delighted to receive a few lines from her, but if she felt unequal to the task, he could tell all, and say that Annie would write when Ella arrived.

"Oh," said Annie in evident alarm, and blushing scarlet—"please not to tell—not to tell all—I mean not to say anything—."

Sir Reginald smiled at her pretty confusion, and replied very mischievously—"Very well, Miss Thorley,—I suppose I understand what you mean as you express yourself so clearly—so I promise to write my mother a long letter, and not to say anything. It will be an interesting letter no doubt—vastly original—but you know—*all* must be told some time."

"Oh, now don't tease! yes, of course—but not before I go there—I cannot go, if you don't promise!"

He promised very seriously on condition of receiving a certain bribe—we need not say what, but it was granted through blushes and smiles and tears.

Sir Reginald returned at lunch time. Either the roses in her cheeks had never departed or had returned very quickly at his approach, but she did not look at all sorry to see him.

On again talking over their plans they still thought it best to adhere to the first arrangement : Clarke was settled, so there were no other disagreeable incidents likely to occur.

Sir Reginald started for England early the next morning, and the following evening Ella arrived safely in Paris.

When they all returned together to Eversfield, Annie was welcomed with such affection that she almost feared *all* had been told ; but it had not ! We do not say but that Mrs. Elton, (seeing the excessive interest Reginald took in all concerning her, and how his face brightened when he spoke of her,) built a little castle of happiness in her imagination, and placed them in it as the united occupants. Neither was she so dull as not to observe many little things which would have escaped a more casual observer, but which, with this ideal castle in her mind, carried great meaning with them. Be that as it may, when Reginald told her *all* the evening before his departure for Coniston Park, (Annie could never have done such a thing ! Oh no, the difficulty was how such a subject could be approached at all with her !) when, as we say, the *all* was told, Mrs. Elton expressed no surprise, simply remarking :—" How very glad I am, it is just what I was wishing !"

The next morning Reginald was to leave immediately after breakfast. He was determined on taking a *special* leave of Annie, but knew it would shock her excessively to have any witnesses, so he slipped a bit of paper into her hand, at the breakfast table, on which was written: "Go round to the arbour after breakfast."

When he was wishing all good bye, Mr. Elton exclaimed,—“Where is Miss Thorley? you must take leave of her also!” Mrs. Elton answered, “I saw her in the garden, so I dare say you will find her there.”

He left Annie in the arbour, and had not been gone many minutes before Mrs. Elton joined her there. She drew Annie kindly towards her, and kissing her said: “Why, Annie, he has told me *all*!” with such a peculiar stress on the last word that Annie called out,—“Oh, this is *too* bad of him!”—smiles however contradicted the assertion, but tears were still too near the surface, and she hid her blushing face on her future mother’s bosom—and wept.

Mrs. Elton let her weep a few moments in silence, and then raising her head said, “I thank God for it, Annie; it is exactly what I wish; you are the very wife I should have selected for him, and the very daughter-in-law for myself.” Annie said, “Oh, thank you, thank you, you are all too kind to me.”

Mrs. Elton accompanied her into the house through the drawing-room window, up to her own room, so that they met no one *en route*.

About an hour afterwards, Annie went down to the breakfast room, where she found Mr. Elton alone, reading his morning papers. She soon discovered that *all* was rapidly becoming a piece of general information, for he held out his hand, saying, "Come here, my dear girl, and receive my best wishes; I am as glad as anyone to hear who is to be my new little daughter,—you must kiss me, you know."

We have little more to say.—Sir Reginald was constantly at Coniston Park, rendering the place habitable according to his elegant ideas of comfort, but frequently rode over to Eversfield, and the visits were sometimes returned, but there was always great difficulty in persuading shy Annie to accompany the rest of the party. Time sped on, and the wedding began to be talked about as a near event. Annie did not at all like it to take place at Eversfield, but what else could she do? However, circumstances favoured her. She had decided, (or rather, it had been decided for her, for she was very passive,) that she had better go to London for her trousseau, consequently she wrote to her faithful old friend, Mrs. Bradley, inquiring if she could receive her as a lodger for a week. She was to be accompanied by Ella and Adèle.

She had an answer by return of post, saying that Madame Girard was again with her, so that she could offer none of her best rooms, but would gladly give up her own parlour and two nice bed-rooms on the same floor if that would suit. Thither Annie went.—

Mrs. Elton escorted them to London, and was introduced to Madame Girard, and told her of the cause of Annie's visit.

The little French friend was delighted beyond expression even in French, and ere the week was ended, had represented or misrepresented the idea of the marriage taking place at Sir Reginald's parents' house as preposterous, and this argument coincided so exactly with Annie's feelings, that the consent of all parties was soon gained for it to be from Mrs. Bradley's house.

It was a very quiet affair; the Eltons, Girards, and (at Annie's earnest request,) Mrs. Bradley, were present.

* * * * *

People wonder what is the first remark of a bridal pair when they find themselves alone in their travelling carriage.—On the present occasion, we are happy that we can answer this inquiry :

Sir Reginald said, "Annie, we were very late in finding out that we were meant for each other !"

Annie quietly replied :

"*Late*, but I trust not *too late* for our happiness."

THE END.





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